

Broadside Poems

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Broadside Poems

Andreas Gripp Harmonia Press Broadside Poems
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Author's Note

A broadside is a single poem that is often illustrated. In the context of this book, each poem of mine has been placed within either a photograph that I took or artwork that I was able to make (though most of these pieces are photographical). I believe in new, diverse ways of presenting verse, and I hope that this collection manages to do just that.

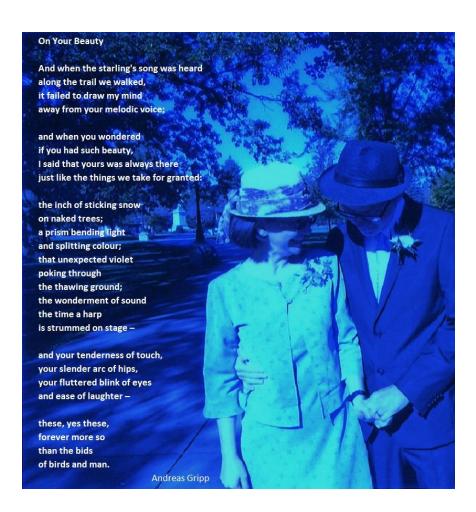
Andreas Gripp

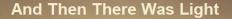
Acknowledgements:

The first photograph (p. 2) was taken on my wedding day and features my wife and I. Jennifer Moore was in our wedding party took the original version of it. I've edited the photo and made it conducive for holding a poem.

p. 99 contains my edit of a public domain digital sketch as well as my photograph of bars from the song "Loneliness Is Just A Word" by Chicago and written by Robert Lamm.

Every other piece in this collection is a 100% creation of my own. Thanks.





With your hands wrist-deep in fertile soil, you tell me your daughter passed away at break of dawn, on a day that our star rose without hindering cloud;

and you mused that early morning, before you sadly went and found her, stiff as a petrified trunk and her unblinking eyes locked upon the ceiling, that to call it "sun" is a misnomer, for it's connected to *Mother* Earth, and either "u" or "o", it says the same masculine thing.

It's the female that reproduces, you said, gives seeds a place to call home.

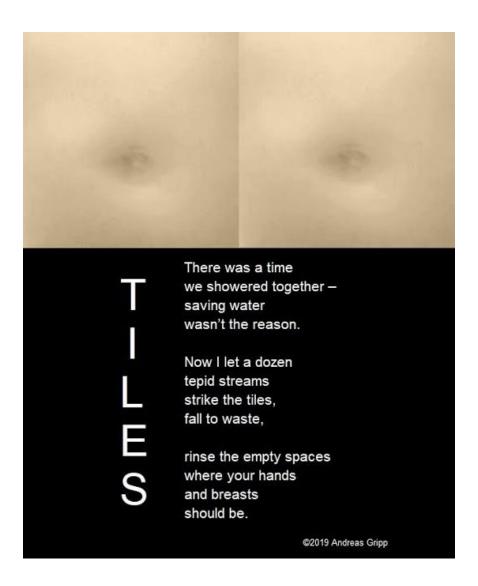
"Daughter," you decreed, call it Daughter. It will surely love us more and our weeping will be greater on the days it isn't there.



Miracle

Tonight I will ask you to marry me. You will surely say I am mad, in the British sense of the word, and then laugh off my promise to love and commit as I-must-have-stopped-over-at-the-pub-and-had-a-few-too-many before our coffee date on this insignificant middle-of-the-week kind of evening.

But this day is anything but ordinary:
Look at my hands, they are stained
from painting my kitchen the colour
that is your favourite
even though my eyesight is failing,
and I'm convinced that both our God
and the birds have given us their blessing
as shoots sprouted in my garden overnight
from seeds dropped from above
and the weather person on TV
said there'd be no rain
for the next seven Saturdays to come.

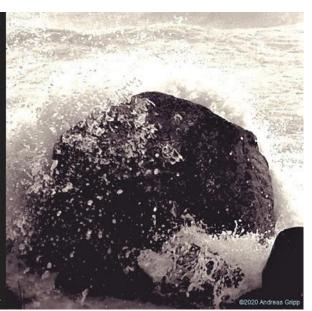


Marooning the Muse

We sat at the beach together
but I didn't write a thing.
I looked to the horizon
and its meeting of sky and sea
and the cerulean they both shared
at the point where we see
the world is round indeed.

You wrote of sandpipers on the strand and the seagulls encircling the trawler traversing the harbour,

and I left you the metaphors to find while I was lost in a reverie that had Magellan meeting Eratosthenes on the edge of a precipice, saying yes, it's all an illusion, this vortex of birds and their fish, this looping of ships and our poems.



Early Morning Rain

In the yard, you felt sorry for the slug that crept so slowly up the stem of one of your greens.

Poor thing, it doesn't even have a shell to call a home.

Afterward,
I compared it with its cousin,
the snail, several of which will
gather in the garden
after an early morning rain —

sturdy, in the swirly cave it carries on its back, a place to retract its head in when it pours, feigning it isn't there, perhaps, should a desperate, homeless mollusk come to call, knowing there isn't any room for two.

and yet burdened by that extra weight, its inability to travel wherever it may wish, at its turtle-like, sloth-like pace, like a car that's always pulling a camper/trailer,

never having the mettle to face the world when things get tough, even ducking in its hovel when there isn't a cloud in the sky.



The way our cat sleeps on books makes us think of osmosis: her head reposed on the cover's title, her paw outstretched over the author's name denoting some kind of kinship, as though the writer forged a portal for lazy felines to stealthily enter.

I've heard that whiskers help a cat to navigate the dark, are conductors that channel information to its brain in a manner much quicker than the antiquated roundabouts of a podium-chained professor.

Let's wake our dearest pet upon sufficient assimilation, see if she spouts some Shakespeare as none other than Shylock could –

or replace *The Merchant of Venice* with a treatise of greater use than a reprisal's pound of flesh, done in a hush that doesn't disturb,

propping A Brief History of Time beneath her chin and await the meows that otherwise beckon us to feed, to stroke, to clean her kitty litter, that speak instead of cosmological aeons, the pull of black holes, the deep red shift in stars much too far for us to see.



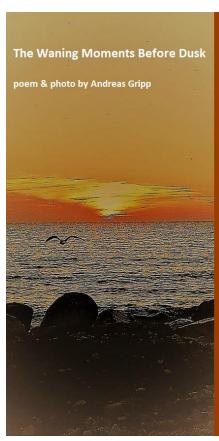
As a boy, I saw only sand and sea and stones I pitched with a splash beneath the shifting animal clouds that I envisioned.

As a single young man on a day of sun and cirrus, I knew nothing of rocks and waves colliding with the shore, only the flash of skin and curves exposed for browning.

Now middle-aged in wedlock, ambling along the beach beside my wife,

I see the patterns on pebbles and the gulls that dip for trout while the crew of college girls, jumping for *frisbees* in the surf, are supposedly a blur below this cumulus of savannah cats overseeing their great, ephemeral kingdom.

11/3/11 by Andreas Gripp	
Blossoms	and the homes of Sendai
were the first to fall,	buckled,
in the rumble	as an origami's
that ruptured the calm,	fold,
W W AGE	70× W.
and the land was shaken	were carried
as a globe of snow	with all the dead,
in the hands of a beaming	in the swell that defied
child,	the tide,
and window and wall	and the sirens screamed
were cast to the earth	of fire,
like an expulsion	reactors wailed
from heaven of old,	of melt,
boats and cars	while the callous sun
both raced in the rush	descended,
of a fleeting, fatal	teased millions
sea,	with its kiss of light.



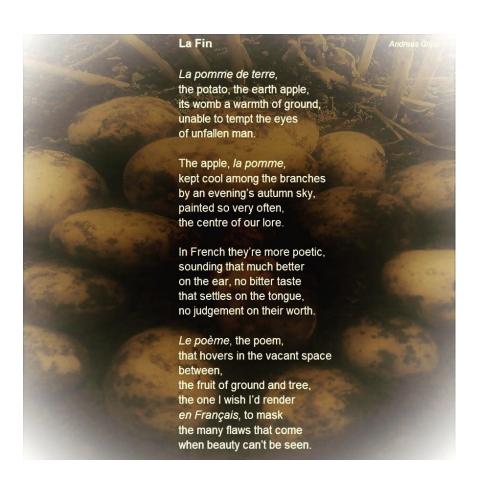
The sun is ahead of me always.

No matter the speed of my car, it reaches the horizon long before I can possibly get there.

A Pegasus might make it a race, its white, airy wings catching a gale to take it within a feather's breath of a photo-finish

or my grandfather's catamaran, moored at the marine museum because it won a regatta in '81, on the crest of a wave reflecting errant speeds of light

that may be weary at last from the pressure of placing first day after day after day after day.



Curbside Café

I thought she watched me as I wrote, a girl with beret cliché, Irish cream and lemon Danish, who'd smoke a cigarette if legal but it's not;

and she's reading Schulz and Robert Frost and the many roads to heaven and I thought to ask her what she thought of love and death and living amid our own selfish carte blanche

She wasn't there, really, nor am I – we weave and thread and move about as atoms from the sun, that settled here so predisposed to birth and fear and loathing.

I see her sometimes, singing praise when the moon is halved and if the evening tide pulls cold, when the waitress looks for dollar tips and the closing chimes ring sweet;

and I have no time to end the verse with lights that cue to leave, the sax that fades to hush, and the cop who walks the beat looking through the tinted glass, ideally dreaming of a night without a single shout or crime.

This is all you learned from your trip to the tabloid stand

That walking isn't as pleasant as you'd envisioned, your memories like the brazen cars behind you, *running* amber lights and spitting smoke, indifferent on your quest to cross the street, the man who's selling news annoyed by nickels you say you're short.

That the Prince of Wales will be Charles the Third and King for twenty days, expiring from wear and age, just weeks after his "Methuselah" mum, waiting for Godot and for what?

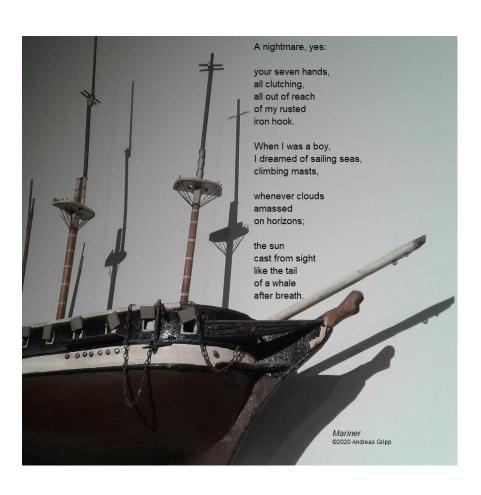
That your sneakers are tearing suddenly in the rain, that they are cheap, that leaves clog the sewers and your socks are soaking wet, to microwave a dumb idea, thinking they'll warm and dry, not guessing they'll start to flame, the firemen getting angry when they see the reason why.



That within a crowded hospital, your mother's stuck in bed, on the 10th or 11th floor, you really can't remember because you never *visit* her, save the time you needed money, brought her crosswords but in *Dutch*, discarded in the dumpster near the Starbucks coffee shop, and you never bothered to check if they were *English* or ever solved.

That somewhere on the beach in Monaco, celebrities plunge in surf, bake in Mediterranean sun, hope they're properly buffed and waxed lest paparazzi snap their flaws.

That you'd wanted to breathe some blooms throughout this morning's mile walk, foregoing the check on forecasts, too impatient to read at home, the soggy pages ripping as they're turned, the wind smelling more and more of worms.



Church Bells

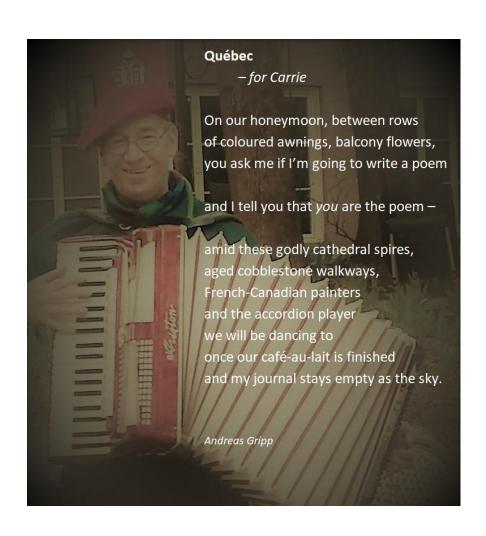
The steeple bell from the Anglican church chimes every 15 minutes, doing a double at the bottom of the hour, and nothing short of a concerto at the top.

I check my watch and it's 2 minutes ahead of what I hear, on par with my smartphone and the shortwave station that's purportedly set to an atomic clock.

They say on WWV that it's accurate to within a nanosecond every 3 or so million years,

though I doubt
the Australopithecines
who must have got it going
could have foretold the
competition from Rolex, Samsung,
and the Rector's reliable ringing
just a block-and-a-half away;

that these simple-minded crosses of ape and men could have envisioned accuracy above that of God, that His House of Worship is 120 ticks behind the times, that I haven't a clue what to do with that brief but priceless allotment that the good Lord, if He is right, has given me.





On Valentine's, I didn't think of hearts but of shamrocks, of St. Patrick, the lush and kelly greens of the Irish, the luck that clovers bring.

So leave your blood-filled, beating organ at the door and your chocolates, flowers, with it. Let me pine for almost Spring and a romp under leaves, through grasses.

You can have your snowy day and diamonds, pearls, to go.

You can have your lover's kiss and night of heated sex —

No, I'm lying.
Forgive me, Triune God,
and Mr. & Mrs. O'Shea.
Your time has not yet come,
for I need to hold and be held,
love and be loved and make love,
and dream of Dublin another day,
another month, when the vestige of red
has melted with the white.

Clichés

l'd like to damn the poets who've said it all before: the encounter with eyes as jewels. With hair that's gold in ponytails, that's brushed or held in braids. Who've met the small of slender backs and the curves of hips and their sway.

If only none had written of the bliss in a kiss of lips ..

I want to be the first to sing you are the prettiest girl in the world — and because a million bards have penned it, it's trashed as trite cliché.

O God of archaic verse and psalm, bring me back to English Dukes, to Scottish Dames and castles; not to fight a flaming beast or bear the shield of the Lord –

instead, but for a moment, with feathered quill in hand, let me write of her radiant face, how it enraptures me, and her lissome, favoured figure, how I'd lose my life to hold.

Let me be the first to say, to state, to scribe I love you. Allow the pressman's ink to dry on antique, rolled-up parchment. Award the abbey's archivist the sealing of the Queen. For it was never, ever heard of such a lovely maiden, fair – for just this wondrous instant, a thousand and one years past, before the Shakespeares, Blakes and Burns have poems that scream from my horizon.

As Spring Yields to Summer

I only see her when she's out, the woman across the way, pushing her lawnmower that has no engine, the grating of squeaky wheels, its whirling, rusty blades, the sound of a hundred haircuts. A fumeless, slicing symphony, the grass wafting fresh and green.

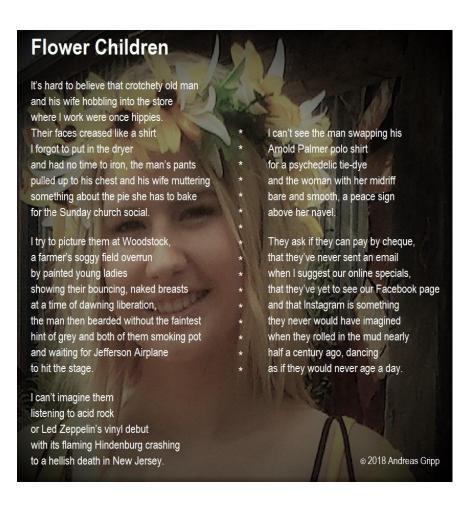
Day and night through my windowsill and all is as it should be:

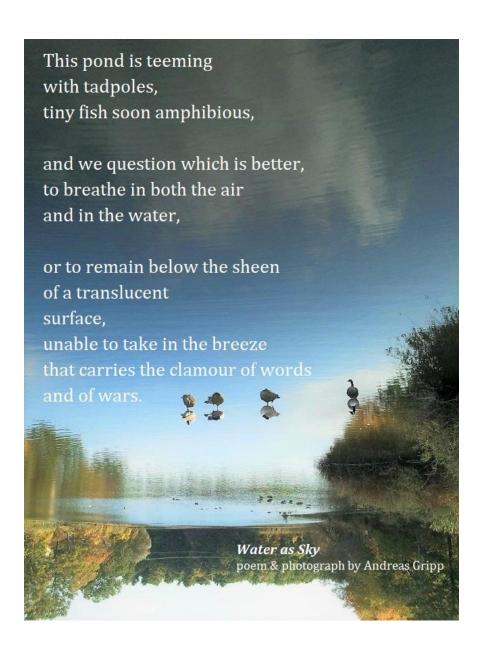
cat eyes narrow to slits
at the first burst of light,
squirrels play tag,
bumblebees collect, send static
through the afternoon;
dogs howl at three-quarter moons
and backyard Copernicans
marvel

A couple kiss and rock on gently swinging seats, embrace, sigh into sleep, and dawn comes back again, announced by startled yawns and singing larks.

As Spring yields to Summer, tulips slump head-first, vibrancy fades, reds go rose, goldenrod yellows, joining the ordinary around us.

There's my neighbour riding his bicycle, narrowly missed by a milk truck, Ms. April May receiving delivery, twice weekly, half a quart, that, and measurements long thought dead still heaving their penultimate breath.





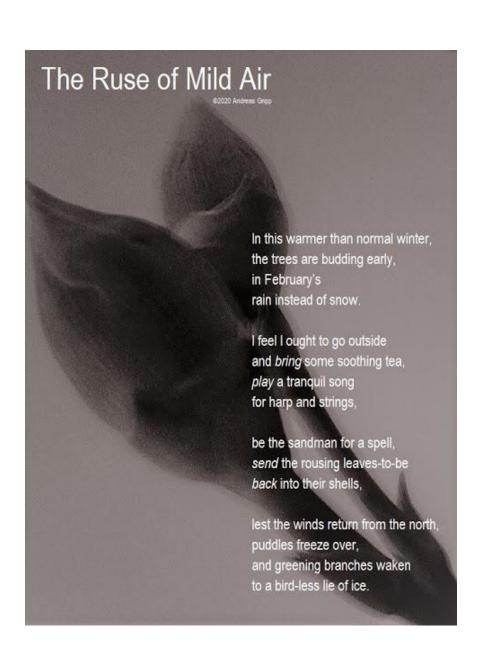
The carnation I left you
was given with much pondering –
not as romantic, they'll say,
as its more beloved, historic rival,
the rose;

not as many songs and poems describing its allure;

without plethora
of oil paintings
to capture its pale pink petals
on canvas –

but please remember, darling,
it will last a little bit longer,
even if but a day,
those extra, precious hours to say
I love you, I'm sorry, come back to me.

"The Carnation" poem & photograph by Andreas Gripp



The path to peace it's said is found in sacred books of old, on parchment, scrolls and ink; in a choir's hallelujah, ringing bells and fervent prayer.

Let's scribe our wishful reveries, our old prophetic songs, say the bomb will never fall; that police will join the protest and the judge will grant a pardon to the Native kid in chains.

For it's not that hard to add a verse and paint a pretty picture:

Governments disband, there's no more need to demonstrate, and prison gates swing open, those who leave bear violets, while violence drops as dust.

Faith begets trust,
trust begets love,
and the one who was your enemy
brings you candy in the night,
saying all is calm in Jerusalem,
and flags are neither waved nor burned.

Anthem – poem and photo by Andreas Gripp

Andante in H — for Carrie Each note I play on the piano is for you I say, in my adoration, the real ones and the ones that I've made up, and I really can't play the piano as well as I pretend I can, but the songs I string together, impromptu, spontaneous as they may be, are nonetheless love songs, ones that Brahms and Debussy could have conjured had they not been so obsessed with trite details like composition

and wondering if the cellist and pianist

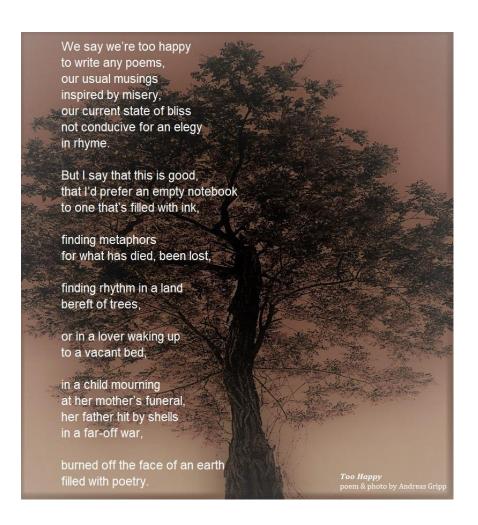
and the gasps from a startled audience

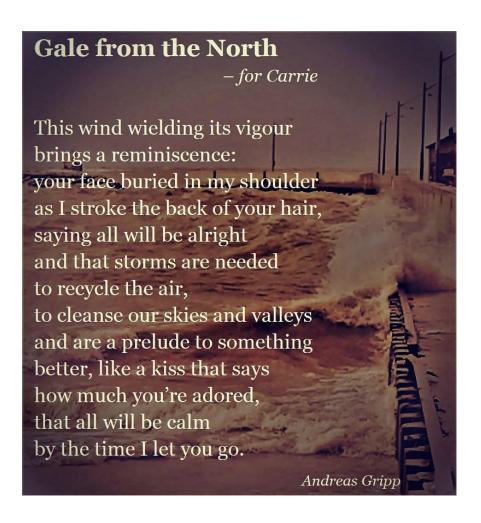
who'd heard nothing like this before.

could really play their instruments

amid the frantic waves of a baton

or were merely faking it





Coda

I dedicate the poems I'll never write to you and to us, tiring, perhaps, of coming up with original ways to say *love*, of finding a miracle in the humdrum, of finding a thesaurus that does the trick.

So as for that dishevelled old man
I pass by on the sidewalk,
he II remain anonymous and his shuffling
stay un-scribed.
I will not imagine him as a sturdy young lad
whose heart was cruelly splintered
at a high-school dance

and the verses on the abandoned house with its peeling paint and missing-a-few-planks veranda: I won't picture the children who may have raced throughout its corridors

or the daughter
whose father caught her
with her teenaged beau
on the backyard swing,
or the tree branch
on which it was fastened,

how the birds helped the mother to get up in the morning instead of wishing she hadn't married or even that she were dead;

and the one about the loons who sleep standing up, their faces buried in their wings, how uncomfortable that looks to me and if I'd ever trade the warmth of a bed for a single chance to fly.

Ashes of Books

There, another thirty feet, the mound of charcoal grey, The Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels.
Twenty-two copies bought in bulk.

The chestnut embers were *Mr. Bryson and I,* by Mary Maynor, considered her magnum opus. You learned of it as a girl in Gdansk, at age nine, a year before you fled for good.

Mr. Bryson was a black man. Mary was pasty white. She taught piano. And how to kiss.

The keys: black, white, and the ones stained with sweat a streak-filled coffee/cream.

And there, a little closer, Lennon's bio, an annotated guide to Zen;

no Jews in sight, no Kristallnacht, just the amens, hallelujahs of old, the scent of corn dogs in Mississippi air.

Moniker	
	the symbol of the lights
Starfish,	that guide our ships,
so named though they	though in truth
are neither:	those shapes are round, afire,
	forming patterns
a Sol-like ball of flame	of the residents
in midnight spheres,	of Earth,
a finned and lung-less swimmer	of water, land and air,
of the seas.	
	like Taurus,
We wouldn't give them	
	Cygnus,
a second thought	and there, <i>Pisces,</i>
if we called them what they are:	
echinoderms,	made of the dots
	of distant suns,
revealed	their outlines too
by the pull of tides,	misnamed,
long dubbed	the ever-erring
for their points of five,	of our illusions.
	Andreas Gripp

Coffee

You brewed tea for the two of us, after I'd poured my coffee, my morning mantra, its Columbian aroma competing with the scents of Ceylon.

And yes, your set of sandstone cups look so much prettier than my mug, contain Tibetan characters carved within.

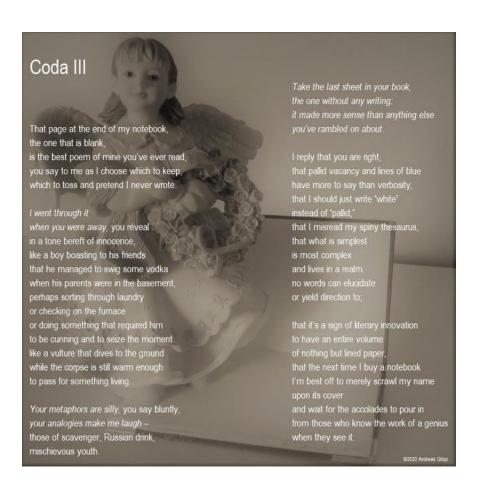
And of course, it might be better for me, my dear,

your herbs and caffeine-free, your elixir's vow of longevity.

But there's a kind of grit, an aftertaste, that's part of my every day. I take it with me to the office, as I pass the urban beggars, the off-key, curbside buskers ever-imploring me for change,

guessing
nary one of them
even thinking of a tea,
its tonic leaves of green,
its detachment from them
and from me.

Andreas Gripp



Interlopers

I cannot be sure that the birds and the squirrels – let alone the big racoon that climbs down from the belatedly budding tree – are the same characters who I used to see then didn't through months of frozen landscape when, I imagine, the mammals were in some sort of hibernating state or at least taking it rather easily in their primitive burrows while the birds were in Florida sunning themselves and drinking premium water from a fountain.

I feel they'd be offended if I said "welcome back" — that they'd believe I think they all look alike, that they might be here for the very first time and I've mistaken them for last year's gang, that the food I'm leaving as a token of friendship wouldn't be their first choice on the menu, that a would-be friend wouldn't assume they're all the same and that they could easily pick me out of a crowd of 100,000 people within a second of doubtless wonder.





The City

The city you say we hate has grown on me now and I feel no enmity with it.

And I walked today, through the city you say we hate. I stepped in snow and slipped on ice but I didn't really fall — a railing there to rescue.

It was cold today, in the city you say we hate, and the homeless sat on sewer grates and felt the heat blow up. I thought it ranked of methane but there wasn't an explosion.

I was accosted, in the city you say we hate, by a man panning for coins. No change, no change, no English, no change, I shook my head at first, then turned and flung two quarters at him – from the both of us, though I knew you'd disavow.

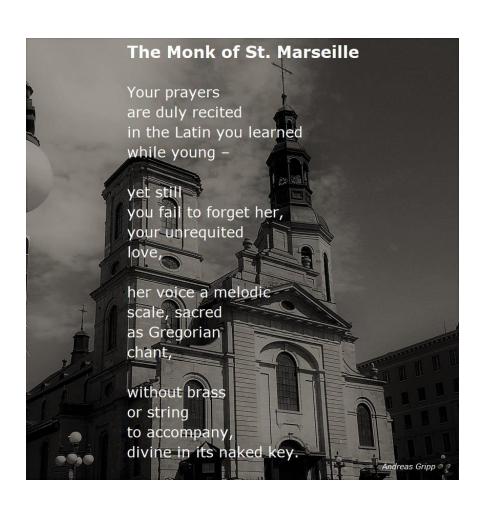
A fire truck roared past me in the city you say we hate. Its sirens screamed like murder but then that would have been the police and there were none at all in sight.

A house must be aflame, in the city you say we hate. I hope right now it's vacant, with a mother and child away, shopping, or on a visit to a friend.

If it's you who've befriended, tell them not to worry, that there's a hydrant on the corner where they live; that all will be rebuilt by kindly neighbours and their kin; that they needn't feel embittered, blame the gridlock, shunting trains.

Tell them, while you too have time to love, a little.

Andreas Gripp



Though the sun and the rain take the credit or the blame, it's the wind that roars like a neglected middle child, receiving little thunder for its contribution to our lives (for it's the water, dear, that nourishes; the rays of our star that causes things to grow).

And scribes of old and new

And scribes of old and new romance the heavens, the seas that tickle feet upon the beach, whispering now and then of the wind's surging power to make the surf that pummels sand and draws our shores,

strength reserved for the usual suspects, ignorant of the fact that the wind has had its fill of flapping flags, hoisting balloons, raising bubbles blown by children, keeping kites from knotting in trees;

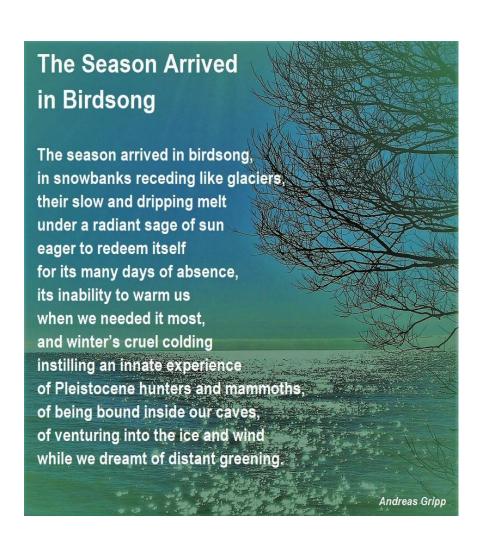
wishing to be something more, paradoxically less – gentler, yes, than even the breeze that guides our sails and bounces hair,

nudging tiny seeds when farmers miss their mark;

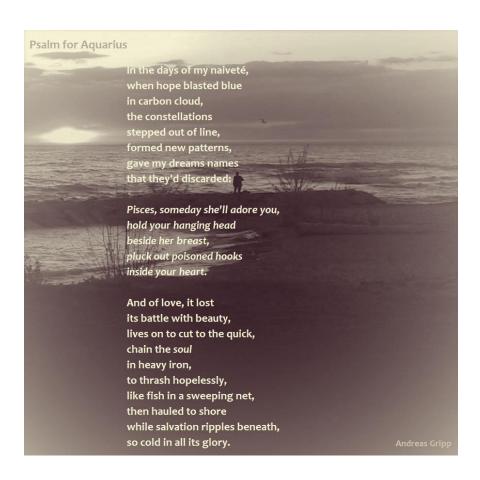
saving a moth by lifting it out of an awaiting spider's reach;

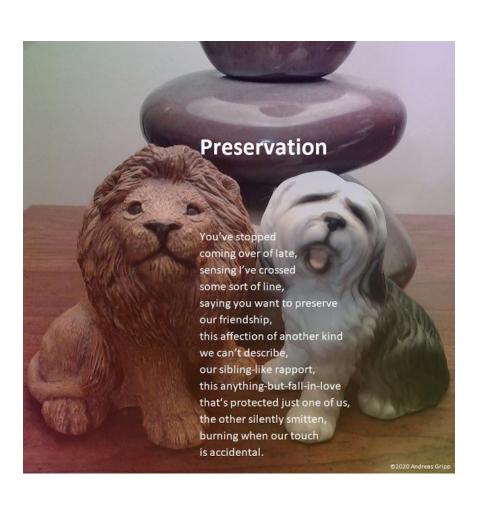
taking sides, perhaps, heroically, but never tearing wing or web in the effort.

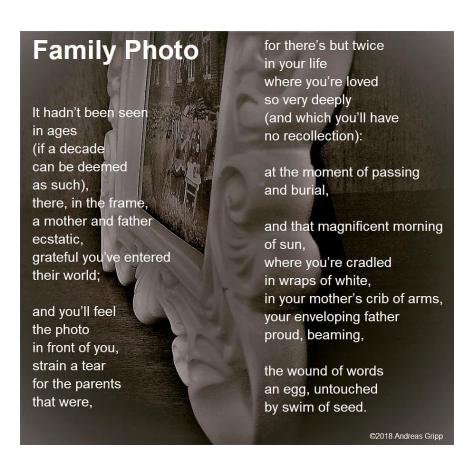
And about the wind, the branches will bend from its affection poem & photo by Andreas Gripp



	I'm melancholy enough to sing the blues.	
	There's surely no shortage of sadness	
T	to birth despondent, lyrical quatrains;	
	my voice just a coke & crackers away	
h	from that gravelly, soulful sound	
11	that makes an authentic virtuoso.	
	that makes an addictive virtuoso.	
е	But then there's my name –	
	with no notable ailment or physical loss	
	to grant entry to that Hall of Misery:	
	Blind Lemon Jefferson, Peg Leg Howell,	
D	Cripple Clarence Lofton, Blind Willie Johnson,	
D	James 'Stump' Johnson, Leukemia Louis Brown	
	Let's be perfectly honest:	
Street Street Street		1000
	Stubbed-Toe Charlie doesn't cut it,	
u	and Runny Nose Ron isn't worthy	
u	to strum of endless pain and woe,	
	to garner empathy from the folks	
e	who'd pick <i>Chess Records</i> from the stacks,	
	their singer in midnight shades,	401
	who knows of poverty, oppression, infirmity;	
S	that I in my tripping-over-the-dog	
	can never comprehend.	Andreas Gripp







The day before your passing, you left it all to us, as if a lakeside cottage could make amends for so much absence,

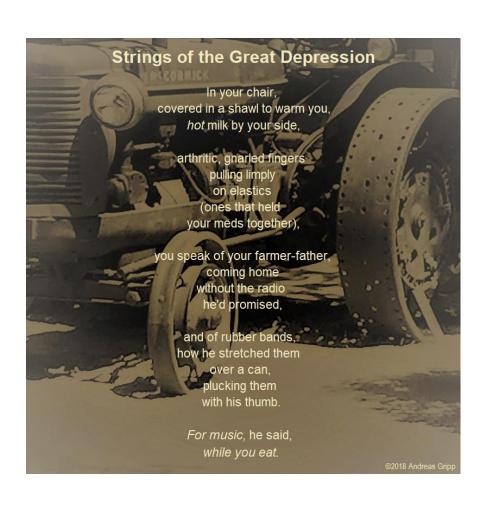
for even in your presence you had stared into the sun so as to *give* excuse for blindness

The sands upon this shore are *littered* with your prints – first in sandals, then without, that no wayward wind nor foaming wave can ever brush away;

and in the musty attic
where you stored your
unspent days,
your cards and gifts unsent,
your apologetic journal:
your final, conscious
thoughts,
when innocence and guilt
became the very same,

a cobwebbed, corner mirror that failed to give an image, a window looking forward to a faceless eternity.

> For Matthew, Who Wasn't Our Father ©2018 Andreas Gripp



Bread, Blessing of Birds and Widows

In the park,
one of the pigeons
stands by the wayside,
watching the others
devour the bread
you've shred and tossed
about our feet.

She's in grief, you say to me with conviction, recalling my scolding from an hour ago (for your leaving your lunch uneaten).

You add that her mate was likely killed by a lunging cat, or maybe its wing was fractured and it took days to die, unable to fathom why the sky suddenly seemed so far away, indifferent to its laboured hops, its failure to seize what was cast:

seeds of melon, sunflower, bits of broken crust.

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Why I Refuse to Write a Sonnet confusing all the a's If you were to give an ape with the c's enough time, behind a typewriter and then forgetting I've heard, what quatrain should be. it will compose an English sonnet Although, if I were honest, I'd say it has nothing to do via the laws of chance and average. a billion trillion years with technique, if needed. defying the rules of death, that my inability decomposition, is tied to its subject, in the process. the what that inspires the write, or to be more precise, If granted a span of the same duration. the who -I wonder if I'd fare any better, constantly failing your face and your body in bumbling attempts untouched by my hands at the alternating as I type & I type & I type. rhymes and schemes, @2018 Andreas Gripp

The Fall

I sigh at the sight
of the moth I find so lifeless
in the garden,
rarely noting
its beating white
in the days or weeks gone past

and my friend who'd passed away from a toxic mix, concocted, said the reason why he longed for death was to grasp the love he'd missed while still a-breath.

that after you have died, others speak well of you, spill eulogies of praise, cry that you'll be missed, say your poems were beautiful, your paintings, works of art, that all the things you'd ever done are now immortalized, once ignored, beatified,

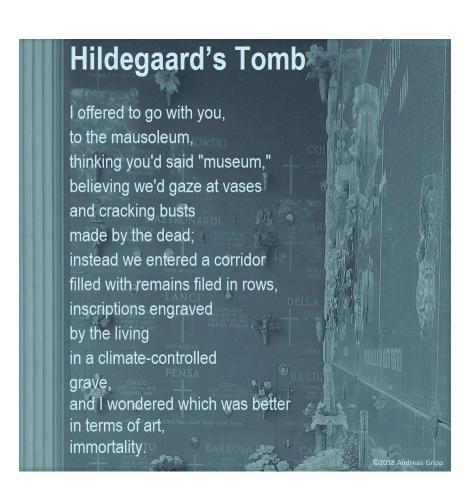
that he didn't want to take his life because he loathed the sun, its warmth upon his face or the birdsong of the dawn,

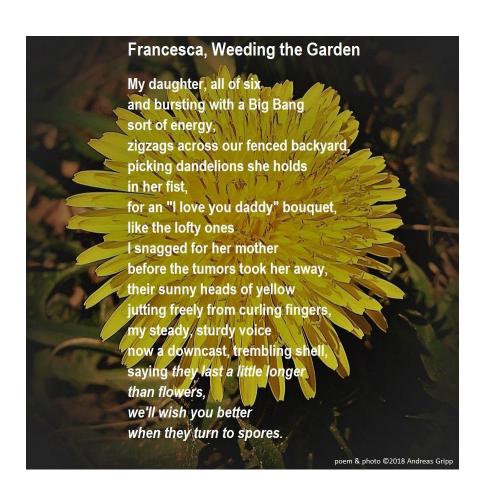
but in the hope he'd somehow feel the intangible touch of love.

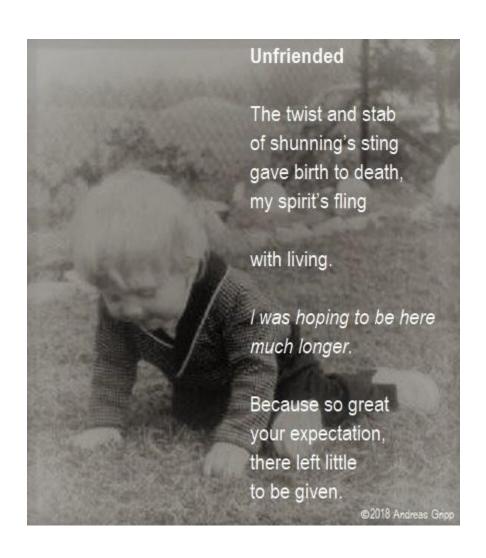
its too-little, too-late arrival, its better-than-never embrace,

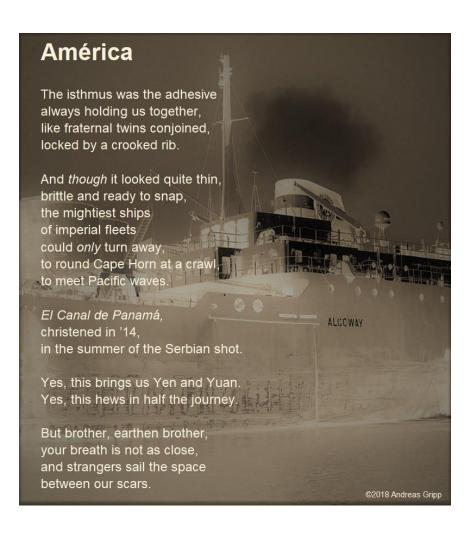
its invisible kiss that's heard when someone mourns at the foot of your grave.

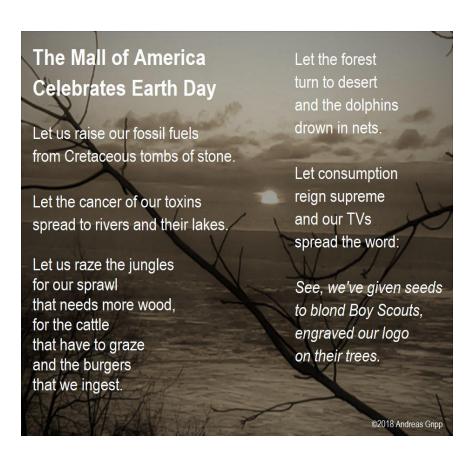
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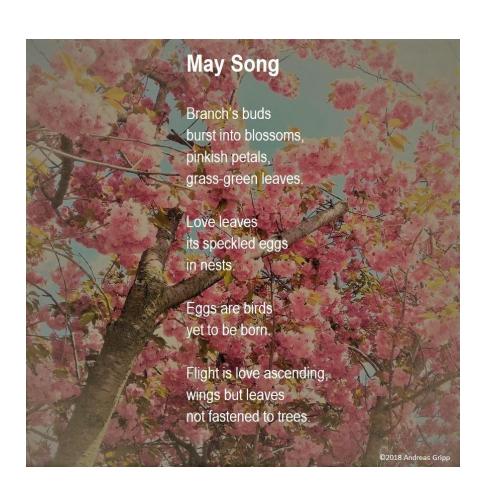








From inside the louvre door I inhale the lily-of-the-valley bestowed in aromatic wafts, I can hear the fleeting patter of rain from cauliflower clouds brimming coalblotch grey, the red-breasted nuthatch exclaiming it's coming home with limp worm supreme and that there will indeed be a sunset after dinner from its vantage above this portal of privacy slits, this giver of air and of sound, taker of water and light, which only the grieving and sometimes the blind accept as worthy sacrifice.





Panthera Leo

That heavenly bliss, where is its promise?

I looked for lambs that lay with lions just to see one in the jaws of a King.

I will shear its royal mane while it is sleeping, paste it as a beard onto the face of an heir apparent, one of my own biased choosing –

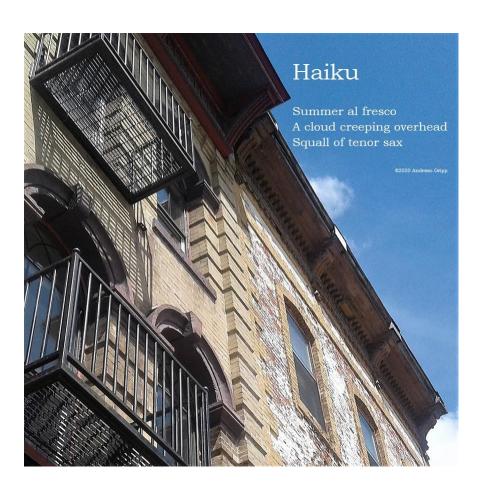
and I will say that peace has come, that there's no more room for melancholy, anthemic songs of death.

Hear it, the roar of a dolphin in waves;

and see it, amid the bramble of your own backyard, a mourning dove gone gold, majestic, ruler of an aberrant Earth.

©2018 by Andreas Gripp





At the Tone: 17 hours, 46 minutes, Coordinated Universal Time

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It all occurred in the course of a rooftop pigeon's blink:

the homeless streaming into lofty bank towers decreed low-cost housing by politicians who truly gave a damn bankers themselves saying to hell with the profits and building wells and clinics in the horn of Africa, Africans feeding their own with manna that snows from the hands of a loving God who really does exist, killing in His name ceasing

being thrown to the war-torn ground

at the same splinter of being,

with the *clang* of a million guns

and on a darkened street in Copenhagen, a skinhead hugs a Jew he would have beat with a club only seconds before,

as they bring canned goods to a hospice for ex-hookers, Colombian cartels burn their hash & heroin, Jerry Springer talks quantum physics on the BBC,

Hell's Angels pop wheelies

while in a gnarled thicket in the woods of Minnesota, Ted Nugent drops a rifle at the foot of a deer he embraces as a son, which *needn't* fall and bleed when love's been said and done.





Snow Peas

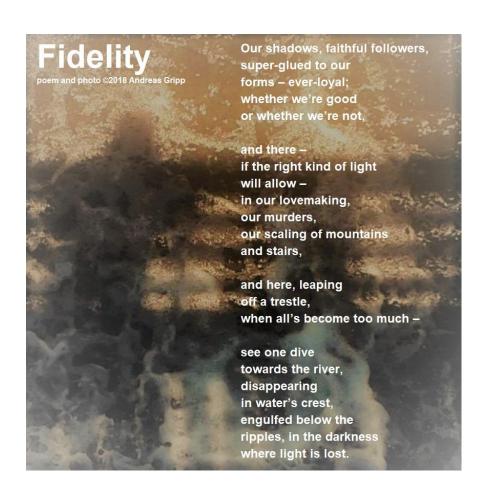
At first glance, the snow peas are strangling the peppers the stringy ends of their stretching vines wrapped around their neighbour's stem, tugging them by the "throat."

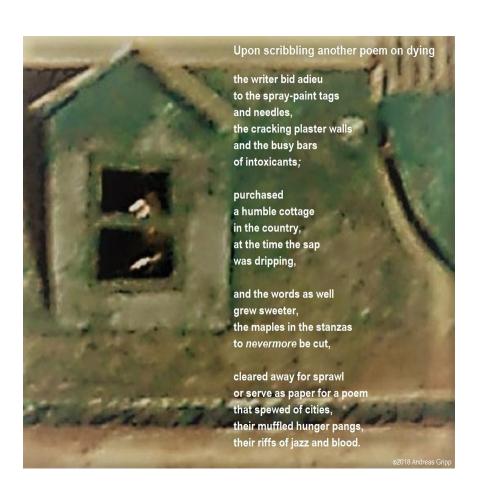
Then, another perspective offered:

It's not of violence or of struggle, the Bodhisattvas murmur from the brush, always finding the good below the surface, it's the longing of love's embrace.

They too have need of this, don't you see?

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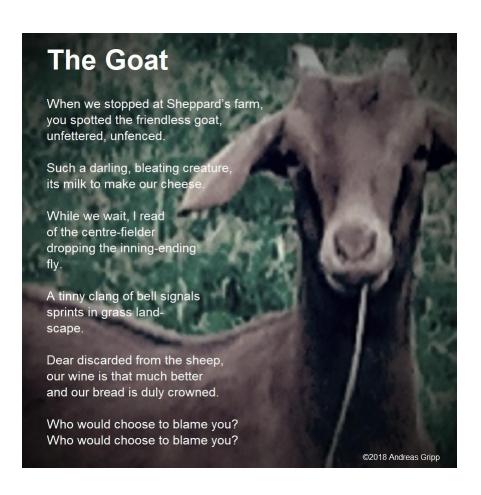


He's showered with disdain by candy wraps and bubblegum, by pools of the great unflushed, and though he's *cleared* contagions beneath our steps, cleaned our counters of its germs, he's open season for callous jokes and blackened fruit mere inches from the basket meant to catch what ranks and rots.

That's what he's paid for is the license to squalor, turning his rubber gloves from cotton white to garbage brown.

He doesn't have a caddy and oysters missed the menu by some ninety grand or so. His office holds a mop and broom and no one comes to call when *M.D.*'s not on the door.

His trudge in drizzled night awakes a nagging, seal-like cough – for doctors have their pick to park, their choice of seats and sex, and he should have finished *Ehrlich* when he had his only chance, and learned to look the dying in their soiled, watered eyes.



Fabric Carnations, or My Dog was a Vegetarian

The flowers in my house are a fraud, marigolds that never wither, forsythia forever fake with vibrant yellow that doesn't fade, daisies dotted about as if I had an eternal supply, the faint of sight and squinters never guessing the awful truth, nor those who call, congested, unaware they're counterfeit.

For years, before I built what's bogus, this simulated sham of silk, every bluebell, phlox and lily were rich in wondrous redolence,

concealing the smell of "Spot" – my shaggy, shedding dog with neither blotch nor original name,

who'd eat the roses when in season, plucking petals when backs were turned.

The dog was mine for a decade, had a couch he claimed as his own,

an old stuffed cat with which he played but never thought to bite or chew.

When he died, I was told to go back to blooms, genuine, the ones that I'd discarded after "Spot" had overate,

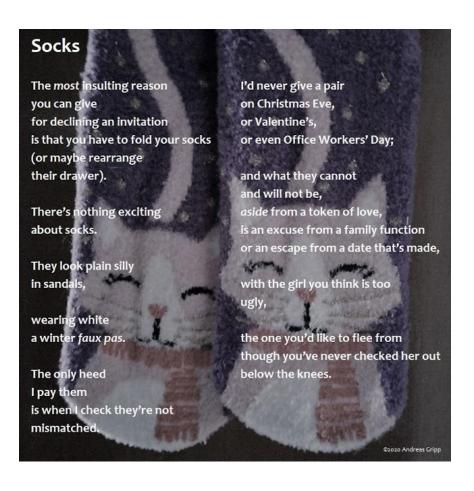
rid the rooms of imitations, inhale the fragrant scent of life.

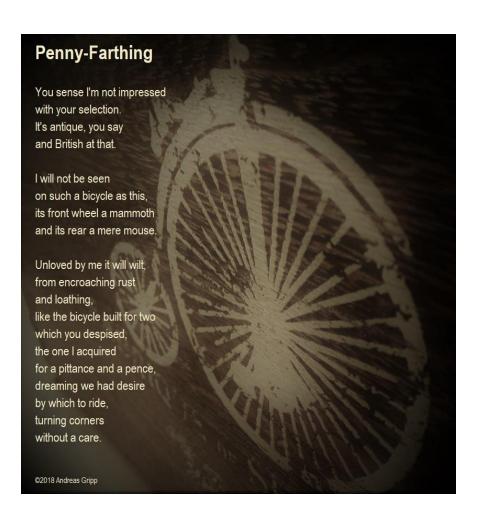
It's all a fabrication I replied: aromas from the freshly cut, telling the world they're bleeding, their beauty-in-a-vase, embalming;

that flowers too love living as much as a man or departed pet,

that my forgeries are better, no perfumes to pronounce what's dead.

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Maybe

When you turned to me and raised your brow, I too made a face.

He sauntered past: grey, dishevelled, second-hand clothes still rank with beer and smoke.

The little girl beside him was clean and bright and smelled of soap.

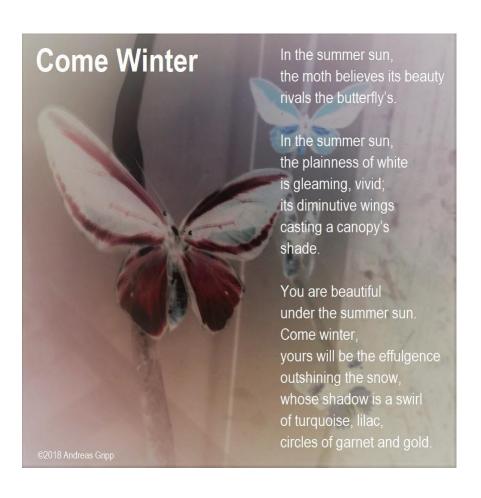
Maybe he was her father or her granddad.

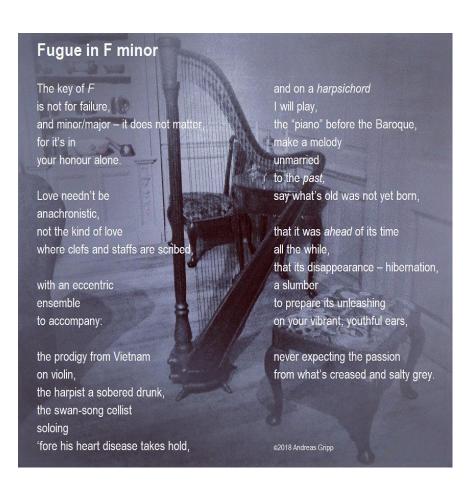
Maybe a stranger she befriended as he panhandled, in front of the candy store a block away.

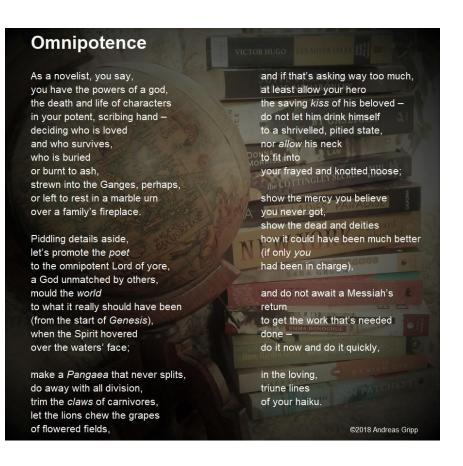
Maybe he had a few coins to spare and bought her gumballs instead of the cigarettes we assumed he craved.

Maybe he was gentle and didn't fondle her at night when owls made their perch and roosters knew their time was coming.

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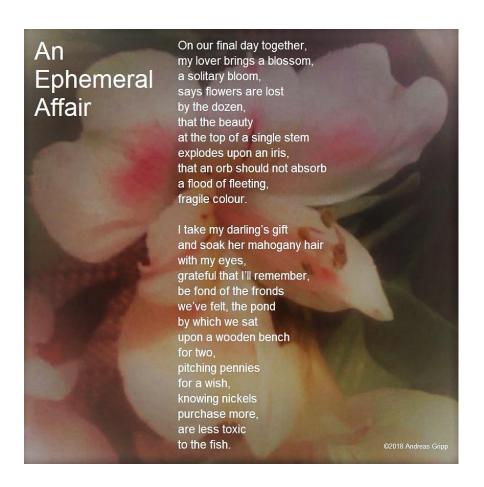


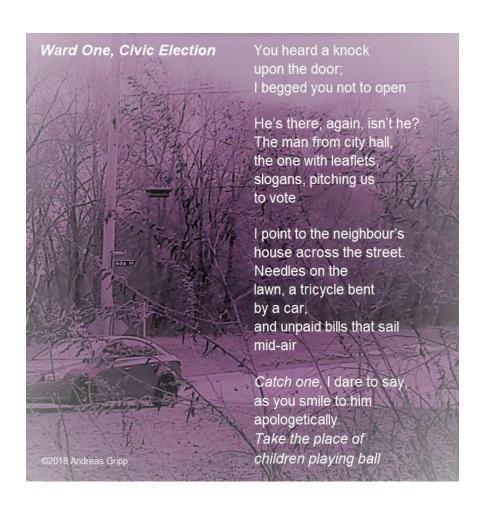


Astronaut

The child still in me imagines the what-will-l-bewhen-l-grow-up becoming true: gaping out of a space station window, gawking below at a world tilted drunk, lovers looking up at a faint fuzz of light, thinking I'm a falling star on which to offer wishes, granted or otherwise, my own but to never plunge back into the sea, believing the lack of oxygen a lie, that I can breathe like the moon and illuminate the darkest of all skies.

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November Rose

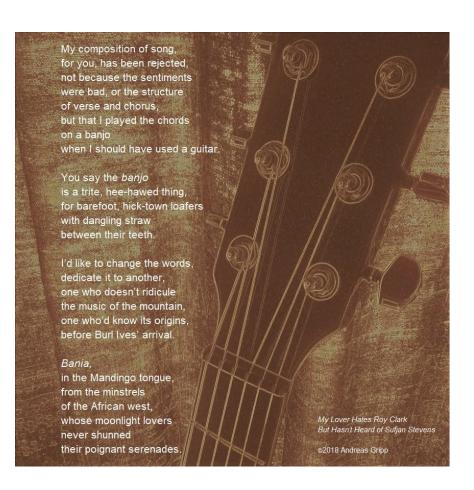
It's a Jane or Johnny-come-lately, the solitary rose in my garden, a harvest holdover or belated bloom that's risen when the others have died

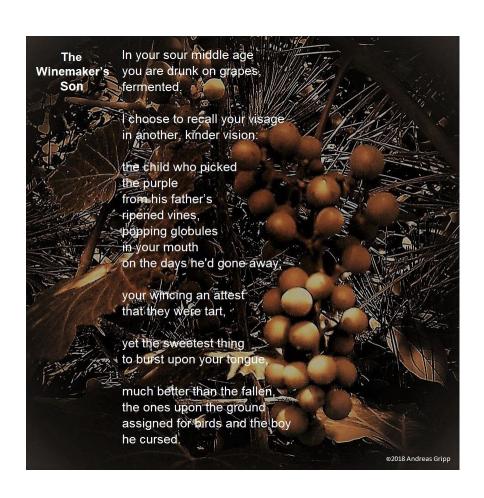
It has none to compete for attention, isn't lost in a sea of red.

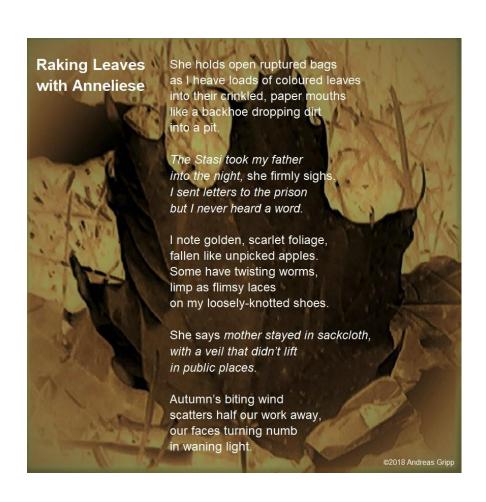
I ponder its predicament, think of it as lonely, regretting it didn't blossom sooner when the buzz of flying insects were droning their affection.

I'll water it in the evening, as stars speck the sky in Autumn's cool. I'll sing it to sleep as I retire, pray for grace should the frost strike swift.











The violin's colour has faded, like a novel in a bookshop window that's faced the sun for several weeks.

It was a brownish-red I'd say, maroon you'd call it, a double entendre no doubt, its body begotten of trees, its nylon voice a language transcending all that tongues have spoken.

You haven't even touched it in the three years since he died, the one you were to marry. But I sense you'll clasp it a final time, perhaps after gentle prodding,

to play the melody you once envisioned, not saying whom it is for, though I really needn't ask, feign surprise at its denouement:

a long and wailing coda, a flinging-into-wall, the splintered wood and silence entreating no applause.

How lonely it must be to be a spider in the basement. one that's sitting on its web, in a corner without light, awaiting that rare arrival, the hoped-for, off chance encounter, when an insect-thing will venture where it knows it really shouldn't. get trapped in sticky white, kick its hair-like limbs in a panic. sensing deep-down in resistance that the end has inevitably come, there's no escaping this alive, feeling the webbing beginning to bounce as its maker at last approaches.

I sometimes have to wonder if the spider ever pities, considers *mercy* for a moment, seeing its tiring victim struggle in the seconds before the kill; being tempted, not by pangs of some *compassion*, but by those of *isolation*, supplanting that of hunger and its drive to feed and hunt;

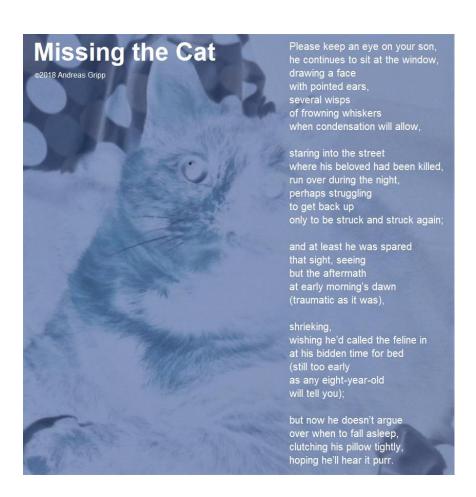
taking an instant to say *hello*, in its sly, spidery way,

enjoy the twinning breath of *company*, a meeting of insect/arachnid eyes, wish it could *share* a tale or two, get to know this flying creature, fellow cellar-dweller, *better*.

hope there's no karma-bearing grudge or vengeance doled by divinity, that its prey will understand, know the slaying isn't personal, that the pinch and bite are quick, that the blood that's drained is a gift, gratefully received,

that *calming* sleep comes first, so deep in life's last ebbing there'll be the precious chance to dream.

The excuse I use to avoid cleaning under the stairs ©2018 Andreas Gripp



The Language of Sparrows

Your sister is dead.

We plant seedlings by her grave in April, when Spring seduces with all its promise, moisten the ground with a jug of water and say how, years from now, a bush will burst and flower, be home to a family of sparrows, each knowing the other by name.

I ask you if birds have names, like Alice, Brent, Jessica and James, if mother and father bird call them in when it rains, say settle here in branches amid the leaves that keep you dry — not in English, mind you, or any other human tongue but in the language of sparrows; each trill, each warbling, a repartee, a crafted conversation of the minds.

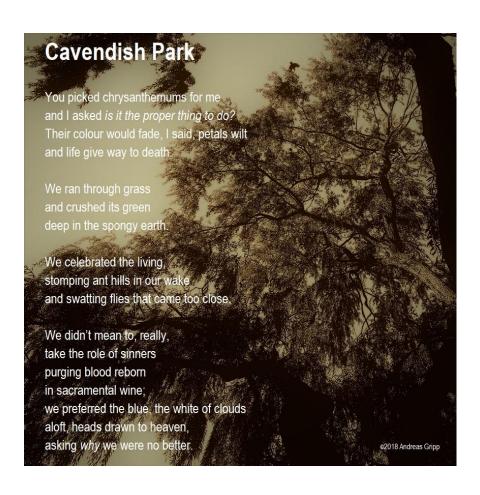
I then notice that we never see the birds when it rains, how they disappear in downpours, seeking shelter in something we simply cannot see.

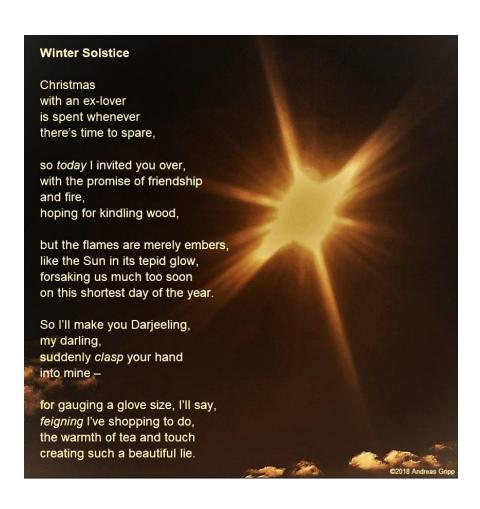
When we're old,
when we come to remember
the loved one that you've lost,
they'll be shielded in our shrub,
not a short and stunted one,
but a grand, blessed growth,
like the one that spoke to Moses,
aflame, uttering
LAM WHO LAM

one that towers, dense with green, a monument to the sister you treasured and to the birds that she adored, naming the formerly fallowed hallowed, sacred, remove your shoes,.

Spirits and Sparrows dwell and sibilate secrets we're unworthy to hear.

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My Cat is Half-Greek @2018 Andreas Gripp or Zeus left the Acropolis open again My cat communes with the mythical, Let's not talk of storms today with the infinite and glorious invisible, despite the warnings you sense from above: getting an inside track on the weather and when the sky's about to change its tune. Perhaps those sounds you hear are the thunderous applause My cat leaps up and tells me from the pantheons up from their seats, whenever it's about to rain, as Taurus snags the matador; by the way she wiggles her whiskers the rumbling that of Hercules in hunger, and tilts her head beside the bathroom wall. starving for the love of Deianeira, she who brings his eyes to overflow My cat instinctively knows with spit and drizzle, a few simple sobs when it's going to pour in Noachian proportions. to remind us men and beasts when the neighbours will pound the door that the deities too feel that which pains us all, and beseech us to let them in, blotting out the sun their basements flooded and the water still rising. when there's none to share their sorrow. Silly cat, tumbling around with slanted head Or it may only be Aphrodite and twitching whiskers calling you in for your dinner, I'm only turning on the shower. unaware you have a home with me, Go back to your bed of sleep cavorting with the mortals and dream of chasing moths in the garden, since we bow to your meows and your purrs, the sun brighter than an Orion Nova our closest, intimate link to both the eternal and your shadow in pursuit as you run. and the divine.

Tally Marks

not as 7
or even VII,
but as ## ||,
a whole week's
worth of vagueness,
waiving the classic
ease of Arabic,
the Roman's
pillared grandeur;

and you rightly assumed that I was counting down to something, ticking days until what's better eventually came, my number again numerical, concurrently revered and wicked:

a triumphant role of dice, or the *scratch* of infidelity,

a septet of iniquities grievous, primeval *marvels* of our globe.

Always complete; sometimes lucky.

#2020 Andreas Grip



love me or don't love me it's never as simple as that when your beloved is broken and the fractures look like the straightest lines you've ever seen



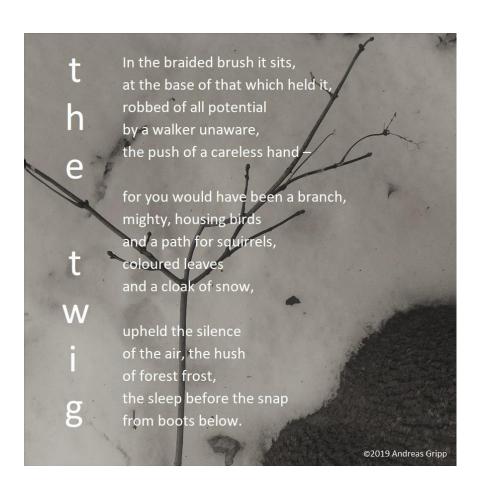


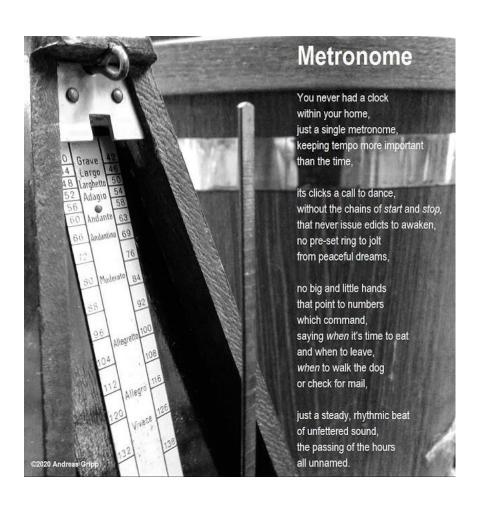
The summer gusts are making Lake Huron look like the ocean — and I envision for a moment surfers roaring to shore at Waikiki and this landscape littered with high-rise condos, beachfront Hiltons where the conifers are and the skateboard kid a gofer for the drug runner up in the penthouse.

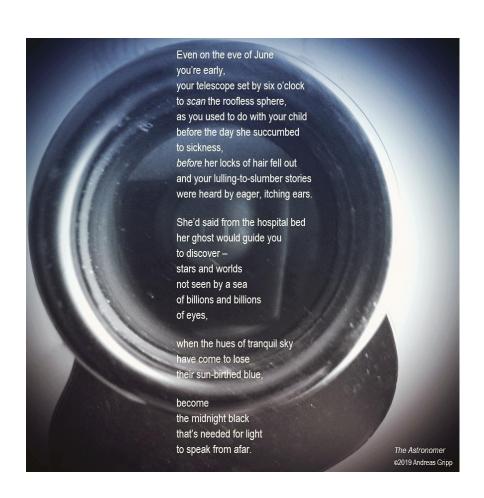
There's little sand to spare when tourists congregate by the thousands and thousands of miles away from that reverie I'm suddenly grateful for this water's low salinity,

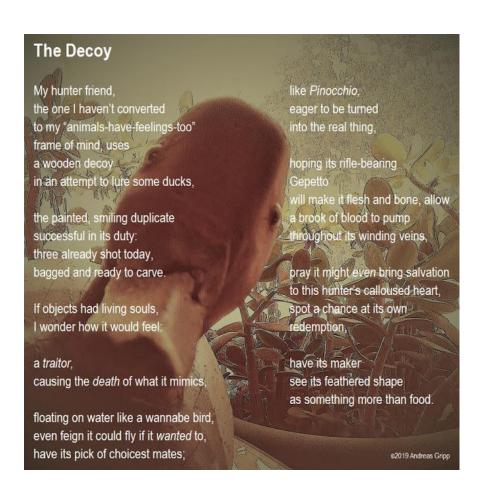
that it's free of sharks and jellyfish stings,

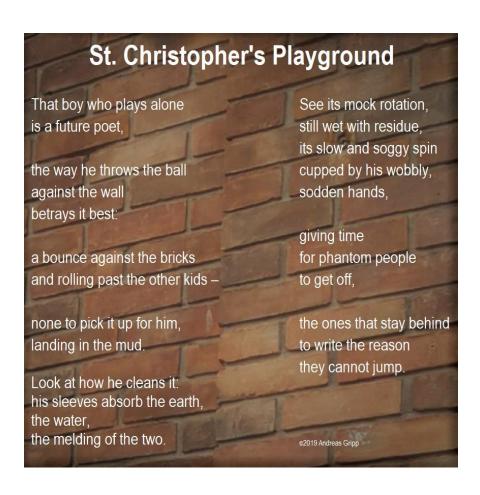
that the jetlagged couple who'd stomp on my towel aren't here, too rude to say they are sorry.

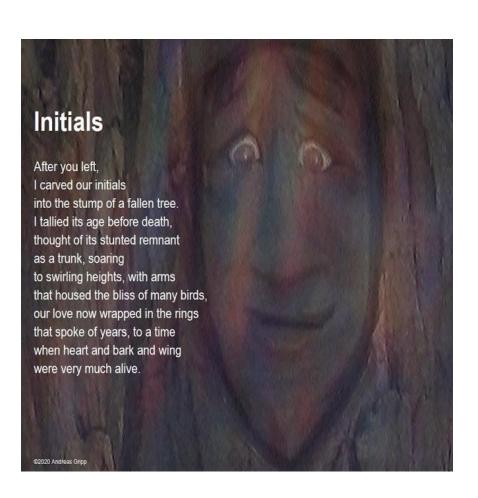


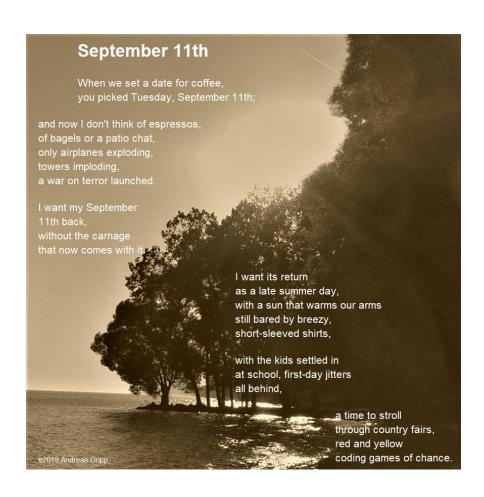


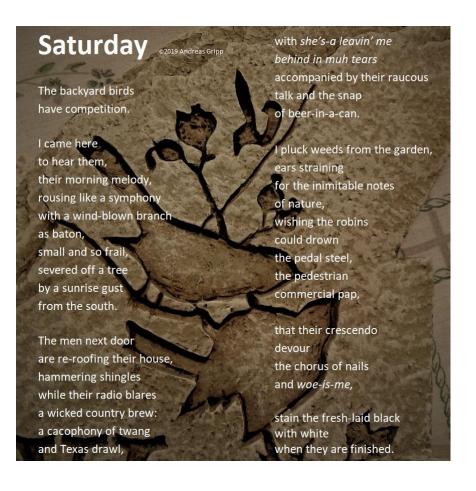












Japanese Robot

Dr. Zimmer's acquisition caused his colleagues to stop and wonder: a single man, never wed, never telling tales of love and sex,

and now, living with this curvy, comely being made of wires in lieu of veins, simulated layer of skin, synthetic stream of hair.

Sue-Lin, her name, she has a name he'd say, always emphasizing she, never it,

and when we came to visit, she was seated at the table, greeting us with a blink, a nod and a gracious smile; and yes, he still did all the cleaning, and yes, he spoke so very gently, complimenting her,

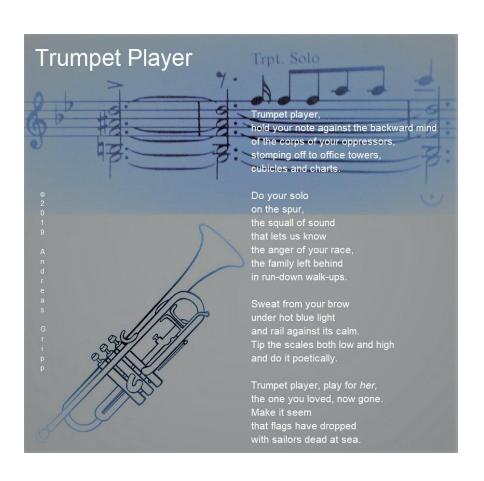
even singing happy birthday when we all sat down for cake (which we never saw her eat);

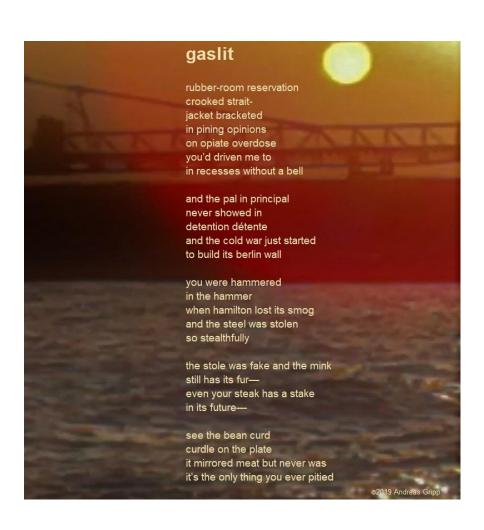
and yes, hers was a separate bed, in a separate room, and he always knocked first, he told us, never touched her without consent.

wrote some verse for her in English, awaiting her translation, marvel she'd uncover all his metaphors for love:

She was never really programmed for either poetry or passion.

62019 Andreas Gropp





Ode to Olivia

I'll sign my pseudonym to your confession, echo expletives in overture, regretting the passing through birth canals, staging reenactments of the favourite, precious moments from the history of Hillside High:

How they tore your dress in ribbons, keeping snippets as souvenirs, your weeks of toil on your mother's machine all for fucking naught.

And when your face broke out in acne, you'd said it was a case of hives, caused by the stress of obligations, that your father fell behind in clipping coupons, your brother caught on tape in tights your former friend forsook, that, and the rest of memorabilia, home to spiders making nests in all your letters penned to boys.

Now no one writes by hand: tapping emojis on their phones or clicking left on a plastic mouse, while those annoying ringtones clench your fists and badger your Spock-like ears, hearing I just called to say I love you on the cell of a passer-by, thinking Superstition would have been a better choice, something Stevie's not ashamed to say he sang.

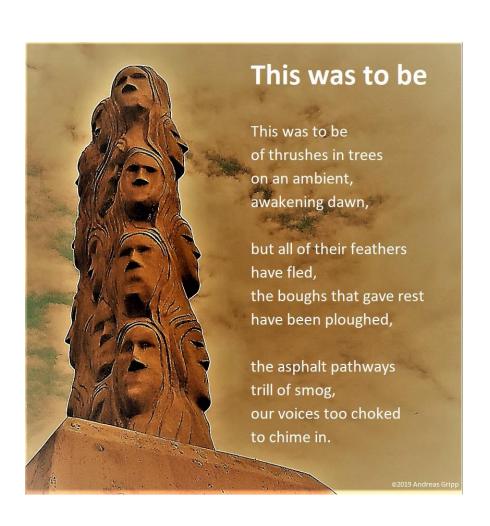
You know I never thought you fat, that unibrow was a dumb-ass word from the kids rolling grass in the pit, near the schoolyard, while the principal turned his nose and feigned congestion.

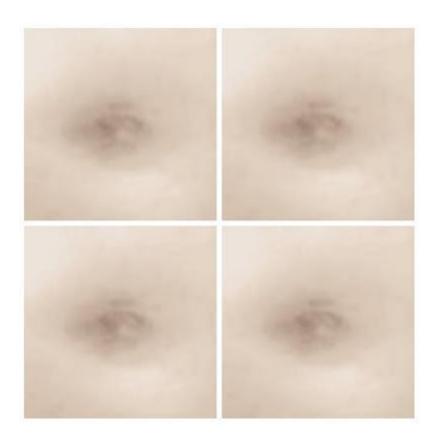
You cry that kindergarten was a kinder place, that cruelty, though innate, had yet to fruit and flower, still covered in inches of ice.

Let's go back to the monkey bars and hang upside-down while it snows, feeling flakes melt on our faces as the blood goes rushing to our heads, suspending the law of gravity or pretending to the world that we *can*, on any given moment, without notice –

deferring our death if we want to.

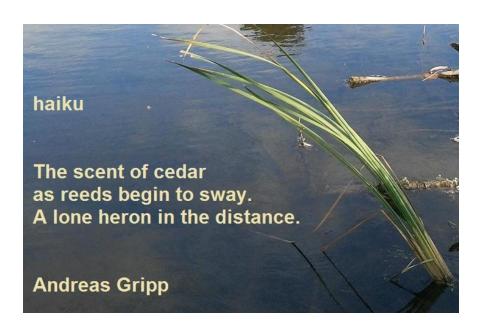
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Haiku

Scar in my center
Folded skin denoting loss
Birth's disconnection



We say the birds Perhaps it is they are singing when we wake, who need to hear, our assumption a gently played concerto that they're happy. a yoking of keys and of strings, When I open the window and so I'll raise my record's on this cloudless Summer morning, volume. I hear chatter, not scales tell Bernstein to conduct and notes ascending, with calm. like where the worms have Bach conveyed in arias might be burrowing with elongated pause, or that the widow where the robins, has placed fresh seed, if they want to, can take a or beware. break from breakfast gossip, blend with the second that cat's been eyeing us pastoral movement, again, from the camouflage or the scherzo. of shrubs, or did anyone catch take a moment to brighten their day we may have what the cardinal was up to last night? judged, in err, as joyful,

On the loneliness of drowning The moment you are drowning drowning has a way, suddenly thankful is a time you're not alone. for a moment, for their gills, of allowing the dead to float, Somewhere in this world, at this very same instant, as though in orbit envision how they struggle, someone else has slipped around the globe, offer prayer beneath the surface of the water: to whatever God of letting currents of their upperhaps a doting father bringing; carry corpses or a wide-eyed little girl, to their eventual resting place a homeless youth swept off a pier ponder in that second somewhere in the deep or a banker from a plunging plane, from which we came, if you'll meet them in the sky, all of us that creep in that blue their lungs upon the earth. that mimics oceans, filling with the wet beyond the reach of lakes and churning seas, that quickly kills, memory. their arms and legs all flailing wonder if what follows will ever loosen in an effort to reach for air. But back to you this new-found bond, who may be drowning Unlike all the other and the ones with your fellow subways to die - by bullet or by flame, who share your plight, mariners: think of how they're feeling, the gulf now black the warming breath of angels by the weight of crumbling walls whenever the ground around them. a calming flood of stars, a cold far greater than ice, begins to quiver, their ever-eternal effort by the stealthy crawl of cancer a startled school of fish to keep you dry. or the inevitable toll of age watching closely,

Nine

There's a beauty to our numbers that I note with admiration:

the shape of cipher 6 and its curving, crescent close; 8, with its weaving, double loop that skaters strive and scratch to mimic;

3, and its ability to complete, to divide as trilogy, to *manifest* as Trinity;

1 which finds the wholeness in itself, never wishing to flee its core or essence, for the sake of multiplying: One times one times one will always equal one.

2 is the sum of love and the most romantic of all our digits, and in terms of teaching math, it gives a break to all our children: Two times two is four, and the answer's the same when adding. 7 is Biblical,
the time for God's creation,
the length of telling tales
of Harry Potter, of Narnia,
the complement of 12.
5, the Books of Moses,
the fingers and thumb
on our hands; giving us ability,
the gift of grasp and molding,
making shapes from slabs of clay.

4, a pair of couplets, the voice of poems and song, the rhythm & march of the saints.

Yet when I come to number 9, my spirit starts to sink: it has such *lofty* expectations, aspiring to reach new levels, only to fall so painfully short - missing the mark of 10 by just a meagre, single stroke; always being known for

remembered for the glory it could have gained but never got, its cousins – 19, 49, 69 – bearing the brunt of all its failings.

"almost there."

99 is but a stepping stone,

a grating lapse towards 100,

a number we only watch while it rolls,

a humble *countdown* to celebration, unable to give us merit on its own.

yearning for 2000,
anticipating a new millennium,
the fears, excitement
we thought awaited us
in a dawning, changing world,
never enjoying the year
for what it was,

I spent all of '99

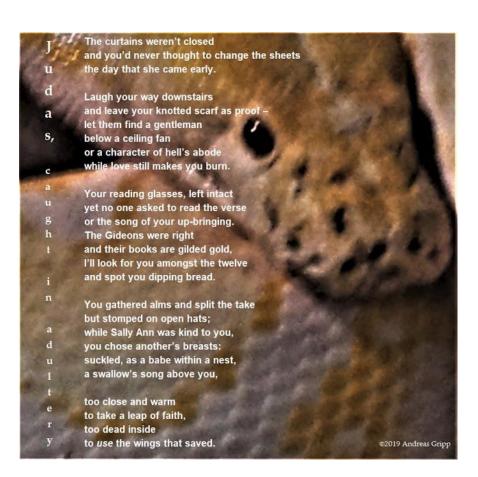
of an exotic date – January 1, 2000 –

practicing the writing

and eager to see the masthead of that early morning paper.

ridding myself of the nines that only accentuate defeat, thinking f'll pass some kind of threshold, a singing, flowered archway bidding come, enter, leave what troubles you behind.



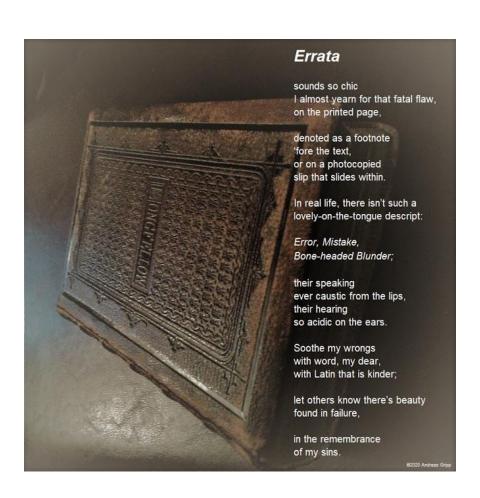


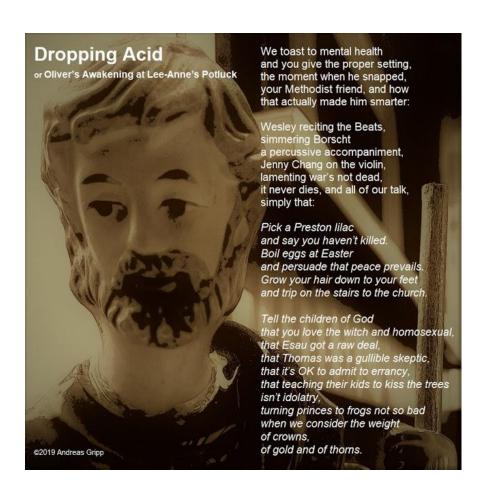


The Lucky Ones

have given up the ghost if spirits indeed ascend, and if there isn't a thing as such, then the sluggish, corporeal erasure in a padded, subterranean suite is preferred, despite decay from a pre-emptive strike—be it tumour or a bullet's tumult, or a puzzle's reassembly when 100 pieces are strewn between the potholes and puddling ditches brimming with larvae and their plague.

They are relieved that it's done, their demise, as horrid as it may have been—missing out on the fainting of grain, the colourless coral reef, a cartographer's re-drawing of shorelines washed over by runaway thaw, and the protruding bones of the living, tallied by children who ask why we're here.







Every chance you get you paint me guilty, the branch of blame that tames my daring spirit —

my leaving minutes early which will cause our car to crash, you say,

15 seconds late and I'll hit a straggling child stepping out into the street (after the crossing guard has left and I've run a yellow light);

or the time that I snuck into the matinée, plopping into the only available seat, bringing a limping widow to miss her final film before she passes,

and even now,
as I toss a wind-chafed stone
into the sea,
how it took ten million years
to reach the shore,
that in my calloused state
its arduous trek
was now for naught —
and not for the simple pleasure
it had brought me.

Before You Die, it seems, has been springing up in bookstores all over the place.

"1001 Movies to See Before You Die" double-faced in Performing Arts.

"1001 Places to See Before You Die" - yields a tepid trudge to Travel.

And every genre, it seems, has its own Arabian Nights-inspired thing to do before the hooded hangman calls:

"1001 Foods to Eat Before You Die"
"1001 Albums to Hear Before You Die"
"1001 Books to Read
Before You Fucking Die."

It's worth noting
that with all this talk of death,
the titles continue to fly
and booksellers can scarcely keep up.
Maybe that's due to the fact
that you're never, ever told
exactly how you'll die,
for it's unlikely you'll see:

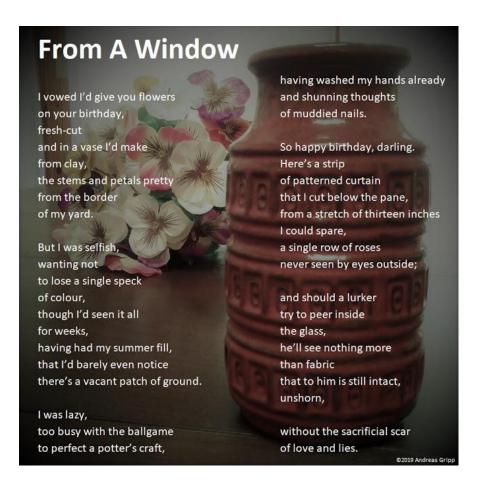
"1001 Dances to Learn Before You Develop Cancer" or "1001 Liqueurs to Drink
Before You Get Hit by a Train"
OR "1001 Puzzles to Solve
Before You Get Shot in the Head."

Perhaps we prefer that Death keep its own swell of incense, its own black curtain, its own cryptic crossword, one not deciphered by reader or writer alike.

But why that extra one after one thousand?
That little bonus, as a P.S. or encore – to make amends for the penultimate trip or film?
Where you're much too anxious about your impending expiry to enjoy that stroll in Oahu ... too perturbed about your nearing demise to laugh through A Day at the Races ...

and only Banks' allusion to The Sweet Hereafter will make that final book even tolerable.

> Before You Die ©2019 Andreas Gripp



The frog that's in my garden is incredibly far from home.

This cannot be its abode since by its very amphibious nature it lives and moves – part-time – in water.

Yes, there are puddles filling holes along the dirt, in inconsistencies of deck and stepping stone — the coloured blocks that sag in certain places, in a way I cannot notice unless it rains.

There's a river to the east about a mile,
30 light-years for a frog, with its inefficient hop,

and every taxing, sluggish jump preceding scheduled breaks to rest,

while predators await, the scores of running wheels ever-ready to squash it flat.

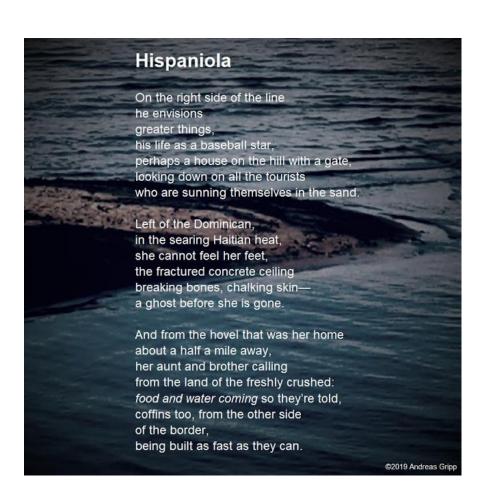
It pours in summer daybreak while I sleep, as I dream of downward spirals, of plunging from the sky and flapping arms in lieu of wings,

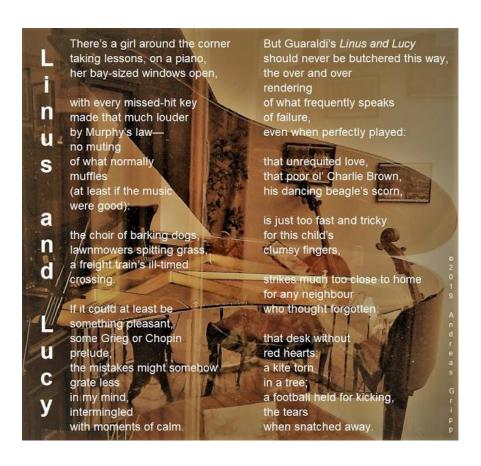
a frog beneath the beanstalk sponging water's soothing drops,

its wart-less head and back now beaded wet,

leaving nothing lost or wasted in the fall.

for Basho 62020 Andreas Grip





Filler:

The album's seventh track, that isn't very good, that you find yourself skipping like the fourth, eleventh ones,

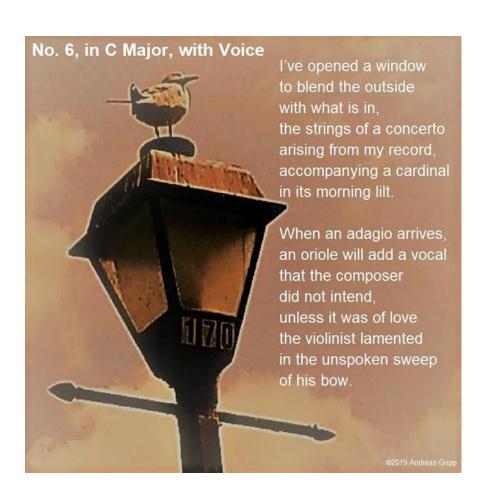
as though the artist
couldn't conjure
another hit,
recorded
lifeless strumming
so the deadline could be met,
the catchy songs adjacent
caught in a buyer's
shopping list —

and the book's insipid poems that plod along around the middle, where the poet doesn't have a thing to say,

as if the blather of the lines trumps the wordless white of page,

the flight of fleeting muse,

the emptiness of things on which to ponder.



Type Writer

Your words are never wrought by pen and hand, neither are they scribed on computer screens, but somewhere in-between, on that Underwood from the '20s. from the days of silent film and prohibition, before the typing went electric, every snapping stroke of key a laboured struggle for your fingers, every letter birthed by grunted downward thrusts.

Your poems were never easy to understand, the obscurities from the Scotch and blurring sight, but at least I know their embryonic state, how they physically came to be,

in their telling
was ever simple,
convenience
never worthy to consider,
verses void of the calm
of muted things.



Cotton

Labelled *pure*—but tainted in its youth:

puff of white picked by black, by lash and heavy chains;

the divine right of soft, added comfort for the masters of the South;

metaphor
for our clouds,
hosting an angel's
airy feet,
never a sound
or abrasive brush.

History, I've heard.
That's ancient history.

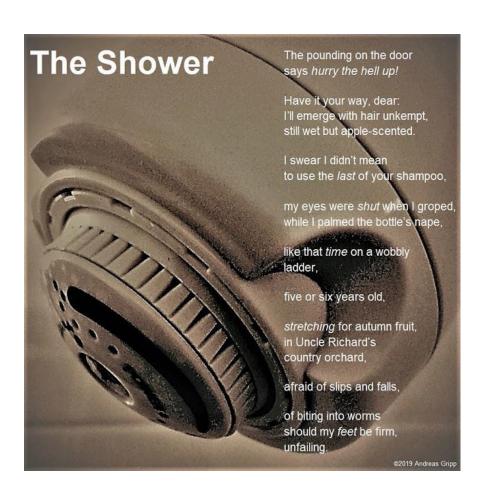
Its stains are cleansed as wool.

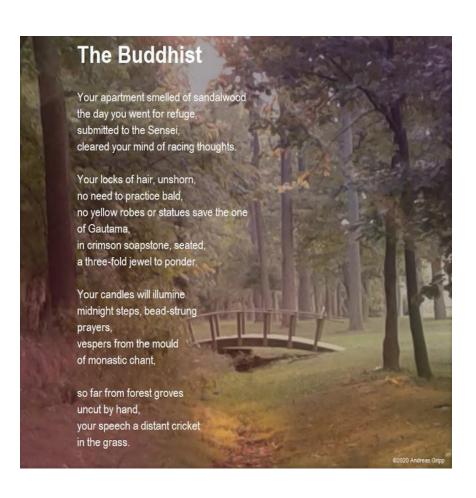
Our child's Sunday dress is light and gentle on her skinthe feather of a dove, its coo and tickly breath;

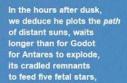
its birth in Bangladesh plucked from thought,

the tiny hands that made in never felt.

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or stares expectantly at the halved or crescent moon, hoping to behold a crater's new creation, amid the burst of meteor impact.

At the pinnacle of noon, we can't surmise the subject of his gaze, always skyward, note the sun should bring his eyes to squint and narrow, fancy if he's witnessed every shape and sort of creature in the clouds,

wonder if he's worried about the big one, the asteroid that's due to smite the Earth, if the flesh of what he emulates follows the fate of dinosaurs,

praying that some God will part his lips if he should spot it, beseech us both to kiss then run for cover.

Watchful

- for a sculpture by Walter Allward

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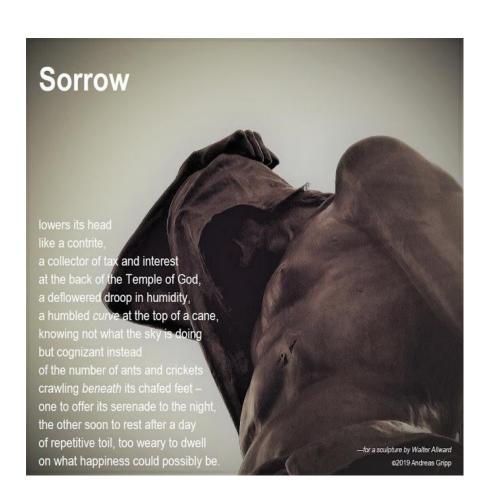


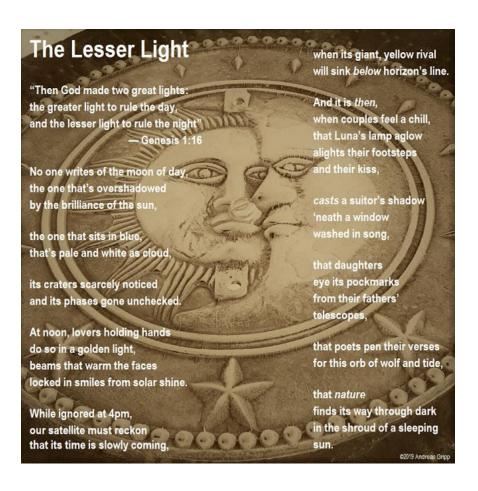


In the 18th-century, men who could afford them wore white wigs. Presidents and noblemen, shopkeepers and servants, Baroque musicians playing sonatas for an audience, the males applauding all crowned in white wigs.

I pity the ones with glorious red curls, blonde flowing manes and those who were thirty and yet to grey, all forced by social norms to don the look of the worn and the aged, no one knowing if they might be bald, had dandruff, or were hiding some other follicle disaster.

maybe one of them
having a chance encounter
with a beautiful woman,
her slender, supple fingers
fondling his fake and lengthy hair
and he would never know how it felt.





Past Life Aggression

Perhaps I was a ruthless Khan, vengeful, without mercy, who cut down peasants by the thousands, taking an unsheathed sword to young mothers and their babes;

or I may have dwelt in dungeons, coaxing heretics to confess, beat remorse from wicked witches and any soul who wouldn't kneel at the foot of the pious, Papal throng

Was I simply just a gadabout who cheated on his wife? A rogue who left his children for the warmth of a harlot's touch?

Did I ridicule the Crown, crudely scrawl on Cambridge walls?

Did my horse trample Queen Anne's Lace? Had I ignored its defecation? My dearest, would-be betrothed, is the reason for your "no" the fact I deserted my troops in the war? Had I fled from German flags, escaped an ambush out of fear?

Or was I incredibly initiative instead – start a firestorm in Dresden, drop a Nagasaki nuke?

Did I watch as the Chinese starved, give my approval to the Red Star State?

If so, please forgive me my transgressions: taking the Name of the Lord in vain; my callous killings of the innocent;

my drunken, playboy ways.

Impart to me your pardon,
your blessed, fragrant kiss –
not the one that Judas gave
but the caress of Juliet,
the embrace of Bouguereau, eternal;
the one that ends the cycle,
trips up karma
at the finish line.

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The Child

Yes, yours was the most unusual of reasons, to avoid the city playgrounds, the parks where noisy children race amok.

One of these little boys will be the death of me you said, singling out the preschool lad on the base of the monkey bars. A murderer, when he's all grown up, one of them has to be.

You quote statistics, demographics, the laws of happenstance.

Look at his cherub innocence, that ice cream-covered face.

For whatever wayward reason he will turn, despise a younger sibling, his mother's scolding ways, learn that knives can do much more than slice an orange, butter bread.



You'll pass him on the sidewalk in the future, your purse will tantalize, sway with every cane-abetted step,

or, on a night you're even older, you'll answer fervent knocks, shed your caution when it's due, his blade upon your throat upon his entrance, no hint of recognition, no sub-atomic memory of your eyeing his every leap.

when he fell upon a stone and you were near,

stuck a bandage where he'd bled.

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from orations from the senates Breath is the bridge connecting life to conscioussness, which unites your body to your thoughts. of the world; the homilies of the holy; - Thich Nhat Hanh the prayers of all devout; My muses must have fled from me from the schoolboy spouting love before my coffee fix, into the ears of his first crush; in the crash of afternoon, an alcoholic's song of rote my pages white and naked, into a stumbling, crooked night; in clamour that comes from nothing, the death-bed gasps of the sick & grey leaving me feeling foiled, in the seconds before they die; unable to pen my poem. from a waitress and her drag I opt instead for inertia, on cigarette. open windows bringing breezes in her too-short break from servitude; from the west. sibilating stories of the sphere, from all the creatures of the forests of the earth, the hunters and their prey, wind that carries exhalation the yelps and screams of the kill; from peasants in the field, by the will of currents, carried, who groan while bending backs co-mingled in jetand picking rice; stream. from mothers in their push abating breath to birth their babes. that lightly ruffles and the cries that come the moment the adjacent chimes and sheers. they emerge, cords cut, Poetry, it heaves. This is poetry. bottoms slapped with care; ©2019 Andreas Gripp

The Pitiful Crow

The pitiful crow,
its grating caw
competing with
the blissful song of birds,
its attempt to join the choir
thankfully shunned.

If the finch and robin's warble is accompaniment to harp, the lilt for ascending sun, then the crow in all its blackness is a heavy metal shriek, the violent jolt of blinding rays-in-eyes.

You'll never find a record filled with crows,

a disc akin to woodwinds all off-key, a hungry baby's cry or a parrot's vexing squawk before its mimic.

Only deathly shadows give their blessing to the crows, call them brother bird and sister winged,

their lot
among the headstones
of the gone,
and the ones who hear
the reaper's nearing thresh,
the drowning
of the starlings'
call of dawn.



Like Darwin Among the Gods

The word became flesh on our scribbled, Scrabble board, an empty bottle of wine and a record strumming chords so calm in lieu of breeze or fire.

"Calvinist" to your "random," with "stop" and "go" branching out, feebly, with little imagination or points.

And we discuss the interconnectedness of all things, how life is tangible – dependent on dice and chance; how the meeting of hearts is coldly decided by the lefts and the rights, the ins and the outs, of daily mundane doings.

Look, a physicist is born because a young cashier has smiled at a complete and foreign stranger, had he foregone the pack of gum you say, he'd have married another woman, who'd bear a son that serves hard time — 20 years, no parole, no remorse.

Watch the atoms collide at will and all the faces disappear, observe the cells dividing, for they too will reach dry land. When Reverend Tucker quotes the scriptures, he says "I ain't no ape." Show him how his sins hold fast, how he fails the Lord of mercy, how he strains at gnats – eats camels, ignores the tailbone of his ass.

If I leave you, my love, at 10:03, I'll make it home in peace, write a tender song for you, how your scarlet locks are streams, flowing to and fro' in dreams.

You'll be enchanted, consider my proposal, say "yes" for all it's worth.

But please, don't let me tarry, say a word or phrase ill-thought: for if 1 go at 10:04, "Ill catch a damned red light, my car side-swiped by drunkards, my chest pinned to the wheel, legs crushed, spirit floating somewhere to a place of God's own choosing.

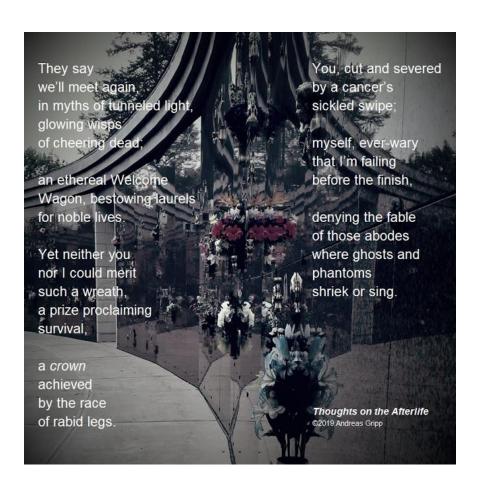
And it is there, as Dante warned, amid the howls and shrieks of loss, I'll die a second cosmic time from a flash of what would and should have been; your breath pulsing on in bliss, the ignorance of the not-yet-dead.

Upon our awakening, you ask why men want sex first thing in the morning.

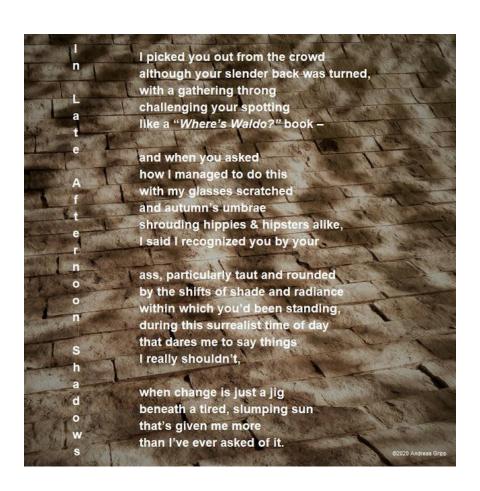
It was merely a kiss on your arm. You read a tad too much into it, not good morning love, did you sleep well? but dear god I need to fuck like a dam about to burst or that final moment on earth, when you only have seconds to live, before the fabled flash of light, then cinders.

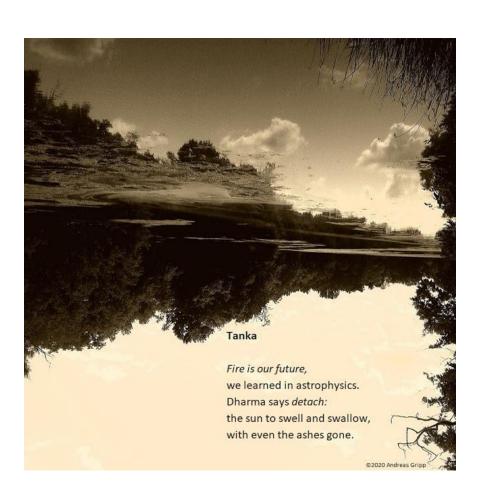
Upon Our Awakening ©2020 Andreas Gripp











Hearing Ted Hughes at Plunkenworth's

Our friend dropped in again, the one who always says he's met some rather famous poets, like Billy Collins, Rita Dove, Molly Peacock, boasting he's taken them out for beer, that in their drunken state they've read his work and said it was the best damn thing they've ever seen on paper.

It's been difficult to prove him a liar, authors and their tours have coincided with his claims but this time he was sloppy, saying he'd heard Ted Hughes last night, at Plunkenworth's, the run-down, downtown gallery that exhibits skateboard art and molds of vomit by its barely-on-its-hinges front door.

He's been dead more than two decades, we said, snickering, knowing we finally found the lie, that he'd admit it's been a charade, the name-dropping, the tales of autographed books (that we've *never* been allowed to see).

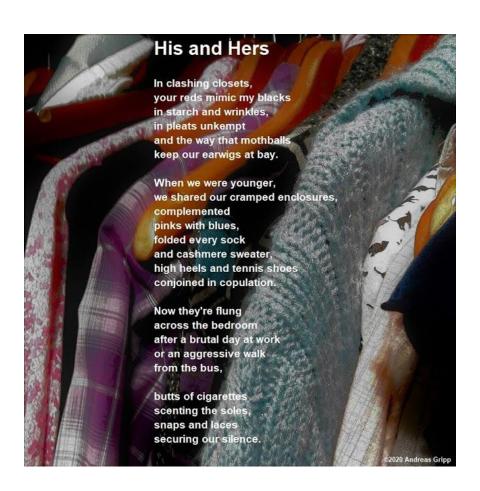
But he didn't blink an eye, unfazed, undaunted in his delivery,

saying that Ted had read a dozen new poems, one about Plath, how he would have rushed to save her, turn off the oven, inhaled the toxic fumes himself if he only could, calling it "Sylvie's Stove," and we corrected him, saying it was Sylvia, not Sylvie, and he said no, that was an affectionate name he had for her, very French as he really loved the language,

that he'd come back from the grave just to read it, even if but a single person listened, believed that he was sorry.

that the dead could be so sorry.

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Seven Day Rental

One of my students borrowed La Maison du Plus Pied by Jean-Pierre D'Allard, telling the rise, fall of the Sainte Bouviers, ensnared by riches, hatreds spawned and business won, lost, won & lost.

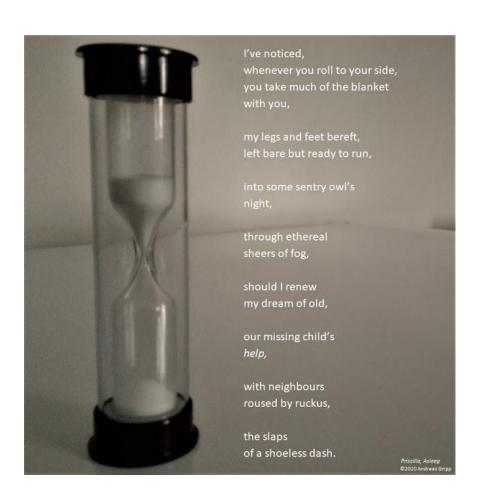
She recounts her favourite scene towards the end, where a liberated Marie slaps the face of brutal Serge, her husband, played by an aging Stephane DeJohnette.

It's the one-eighty, the turning point for both characters, the moment where love drops its transcendence, its fixed and static state.

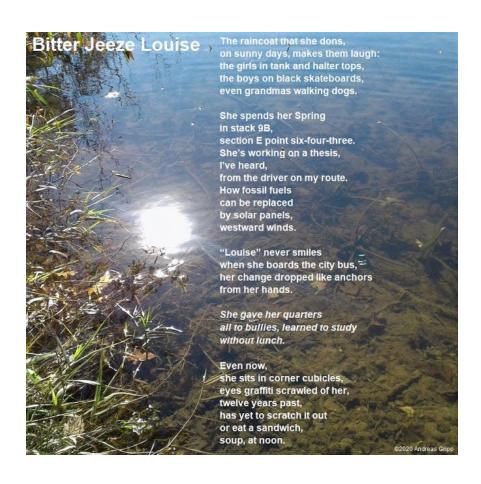
I think Anise, my student, sporting occasional welts that I ask nothing about, has found a muse to lift her trampled spirit as she says the film, the film.

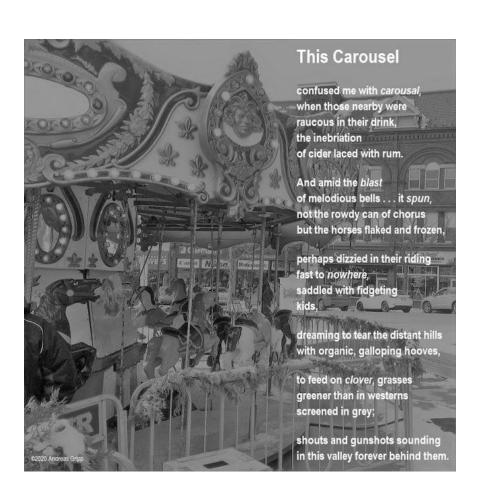
Yes it is such.

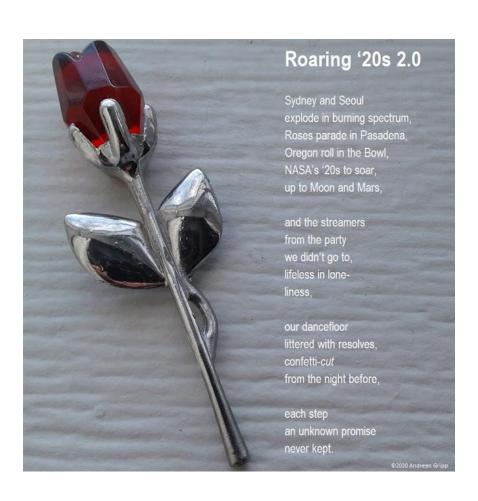
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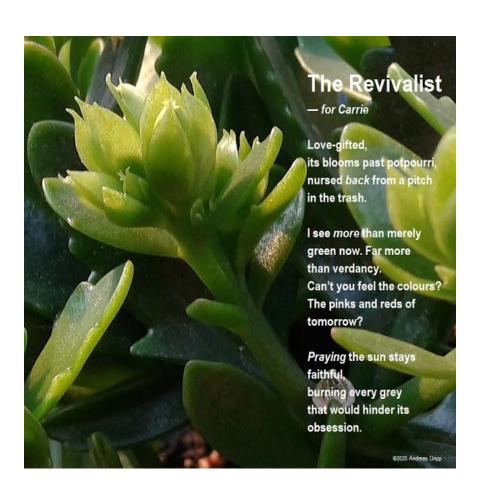


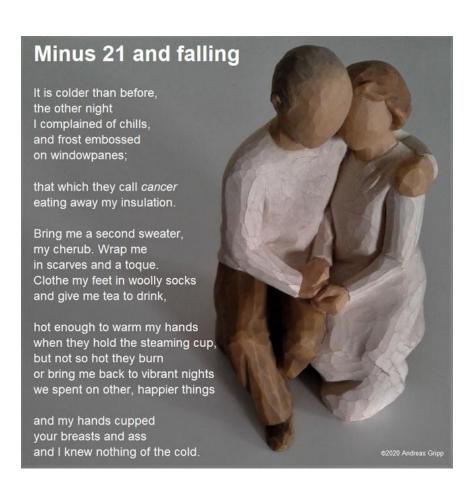




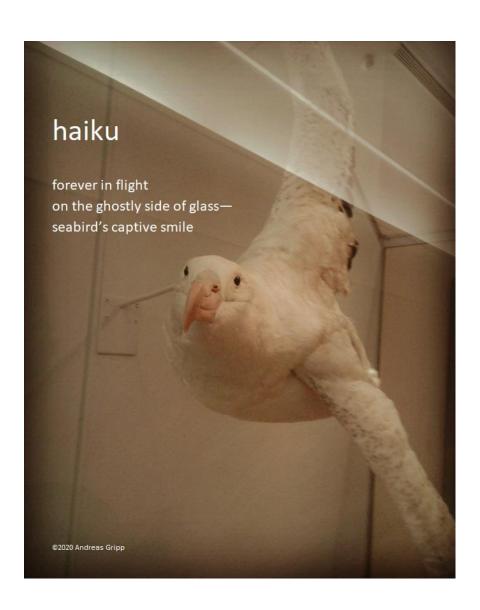












The Candle,

or Why I Can Never Have Nice Things

In our cabinet of trinkets and junk, there's a kitten that doubles as candle, never ignited, not even lit for half-a-second, blown upon before a single wisp of smoke had been emitted.

It reminds me of those animal crackers of old, though they were cookies in reality, tasting like arrow-root, friendly for babies and sensitive kids who cry when puppies go lost.

I was one of them, but refusing to sever the trunk off the smiling elephant, the head from the glorious lion.

I bit them in places I thought they couldn't *feel*—or, if they were puny enough, crunched them



quick and whole, then swallowed as fast as I could, washed them down with a cup of milk as if some sort of Sacrament—

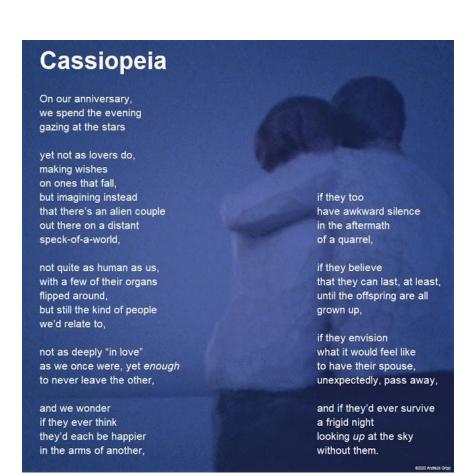
candles lit on each end of the kitchen table, ridding the room of litterbox smells, the shapes of which I never wanted to see, their pointed ears melting upon the rest of their sullen faces, the waxy rivulets hardening within moments of a breath on a flame, freezing upon cheeks like tears, doling out guilt for eternity.

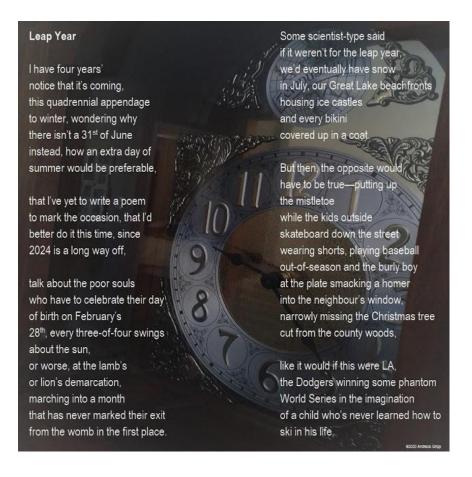
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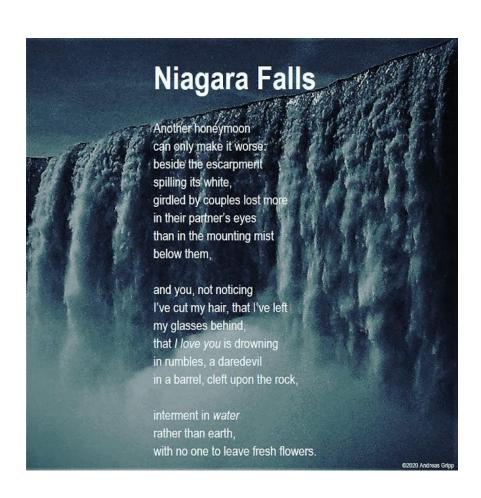


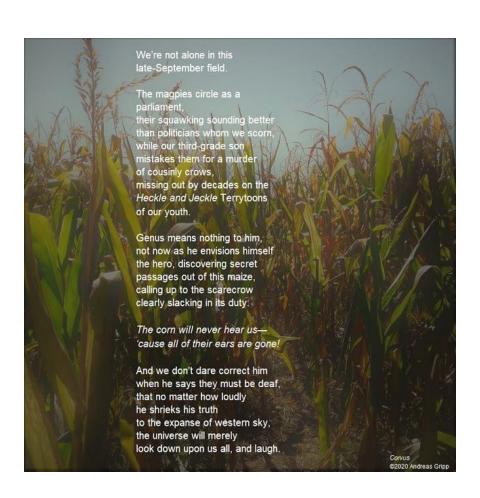
The shades could be due to a light-sensitivity he suffers from; though on this midmorning downpour that is doubtful—and blindness can't be the explanation when he weaves and winds through pedestrians crowding the sidewalk at a gait that's much too trudging for his capering soles, that bring to mind a punt return to the end zone.

And his jaywalk in front of the cop at the corner?
Sure, he might have a white cane inside his flowing black trenchcoat, but if anything, it harks back to a time of vaudeville soft-shoe, when his great grandfather may have shuffled gaily across a hardwood stage in a tux, lifting his top hat above his head and imploring a Kansas audience too blinded by the Dust Bowl to sing and dance along.









Myla Mae

I'm very affectionate with my cat. I call her my "pointy-eared pet." Though at first hearing it may seem a little belittling, it's actually a signal of the jealousy of my green Scottish lugs.

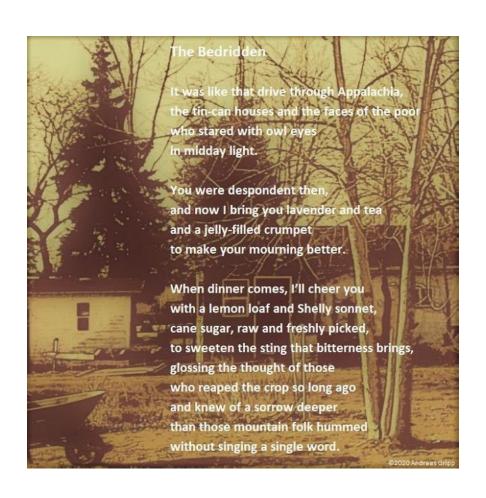
You see, if I had ears like hers, they'd wiggle, twitch, move at the sound of every step in the stairwell—human or a human's shaggy dog, the toddler squalling in the hallway and the mail person's bag being dropped on the floor.

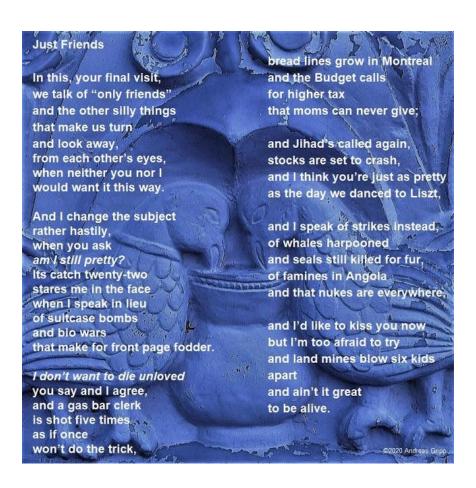
They'd tilt a number of degrees in the direction of a cry, a call to help, the snap of a twig when the psycho with a knife approaches as I daydream, intent to end my ridiculous life with the slide of his serrated blade.

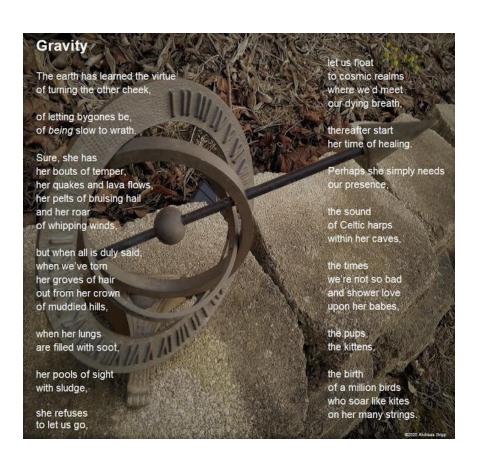


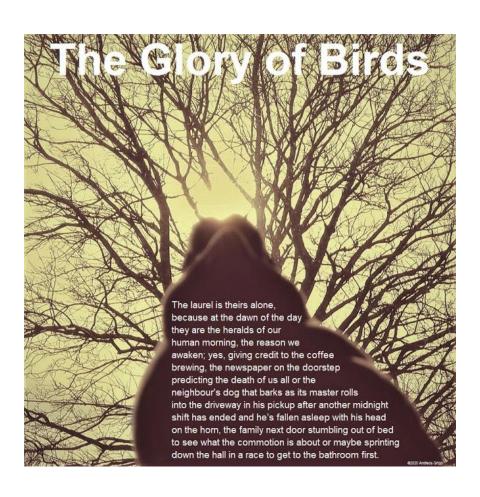


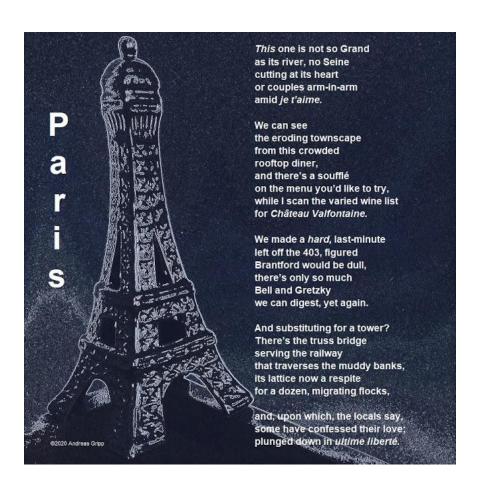
A Week in the Life of Morgan Saturday, everything changed. On Tuesday, wheat stalks bowed in half It didn't stop raining, the neighbours built an ark. You called to cancel as if bending to a god; a god without mercy, and a field of gold our session under the stars. at once showed its fear. I would have proven Sagan right and Einstein a cosmic fraud. It was not that day and that's all it was. Sunday we rested. On Wednesday, I said there was no god according to the Sabbath. or gods and that droughts and rains The Adventists say it's Saturday and we know they're damn well right. don't depend on deity. but on currents, jet streams. I cut the grass with scissors. When no one was looking. On Thursday you picked some blooms, made a garland for Saint Jackie. On Monday you met me on campus. I said there was no "Jackie" saint We read the books of Donne. and you dropped the "Jackie O." I spied your lashes and your eyes, "Oh," I said and sighed. a powder-blue, lips that curled Maybe for the Kennedy years to stanzas, commas, but wedding Aristotle thinking you'd found me wrong, raised too many brows. that Jehovah laughed last. that by tomorrow I'd confess belief. Let's talk philosophy, shall we? my sins, light a candle to the Christ and whisper prayers to Jackie O. On Friday, the King of David brought us fish. I thought the reference You said you simply found him funny. was biblical. You said your friend would look for Bukowski, delivers to Catholics Plath, a Ferlinghetti work and he runs a market stall. that rhymed.











Lionel

lays down tracks
like he did when he was a
kid, predating The Neighborhood
of Make Believe—
he was already in college
by then, getting A's and getting
laid, evading the Draft
till the excuses had run out,
a frontline Private
ducking marksmen from
the Viet Cong,

returning with his leg blown off and his carob skin scarred by the relentless spray of shrapnel. Today, both the medal
he was given and the pin
of *Old Glory* ride in the caboose,
behind the load of Pennsylvanian
coal that's terribly out-of-date,

as all of it is, really, the freight cars disappearing into a distant tunnel like a rodent's tail that darts into drywall, a baseboard cavity never patched, puffing smoke as if a gambler sucking on a cigar smuggled in from Havana when the Cold War brought us all to our knees, shuddering under our desks though we had told ourselves fervently that this is just pretend.

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TORTOISE

takes it personally when called a *Turtle*—scantily mentioned in stories and in poems. Thought only because of its gait and its *longevity*—one-and-a-half times a centenarian.

seeing kings and kingdoms fall, new countries arise from the smoky dissipation of war. Surviving both Castro and the Queen and a dozen-plus Presidents in-between.

You've endured, dear tortoise, all of your animal friends (if indeed you had any); and at funerals: always the deathmaid, never the death.

You were there, creeping over a log when the Wrights learned how to fly, then awkwardly stretching your wrinkled neck to see the moon in '69.

And still, as the unburied decay and scatter, you linger, being snapped by a hiker's phone and then freeze-framed around the world.

perhaps the butt-end of a joke or mindless meme;

that you remember when it was new, these devices for distant speaking, hand-cranked, then dialed numerically.

Only the trees can tell your tale, that you once were young and spry, plodding a quarter-foot a minute while the wild west was won,

spending little time within your crusty shell, that you were far more sociable than we think, a jokester by the pond,

and yes, you were the one that bested the rabbit's over-confident cousin, one with a similar problem and a homophone to hair, getting little respect and shamed by losing a race so long ago—

that to you was merely yesterday, your single moment of glory, the only thing to outlive your endless aging.

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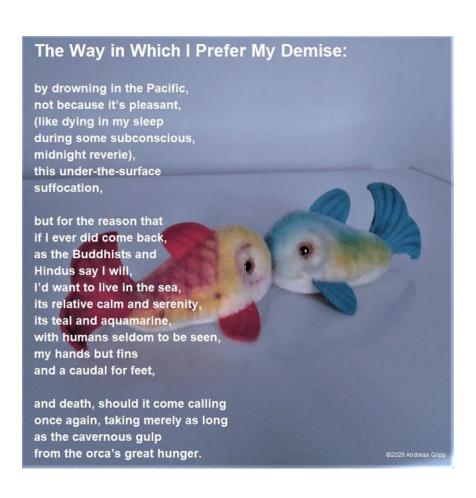


Haight-Ashbury

The temperature in our apartment is always moderate, 20 Celsius, or as our friends in San Francisco call it, 68, never too frigid, too torrid, as pleasant as its people who birthed a twentieth-century love of gay and poetry, where Ginsberg howled and Ferlinghetti keeps the city lights plugged in, grateful for their dead, their '67 just a narrow notch before some elusive ideal that hovers within our reach.

You tell me to never touch the thermostat and I acquiesce. What we call warmth is but the middle, the centre of some utopia absent of fire and of ice.

Yes, the ground there occasionally quakes, much like our walls and ceiling do whenever the tenants upstairs argue about the bills or break into a dance we've been curious to behold.



The Ellipsis . . .

teases amid the white, leaving us to guess what's been omitted, cherrypicking its many biases, filtering out the disparaging in every book and movie review.

See it there, at the start of a neutered sentence, as though the initially penned words were never scribed, not critical enough to share, like lifting a stylus above the grooves,

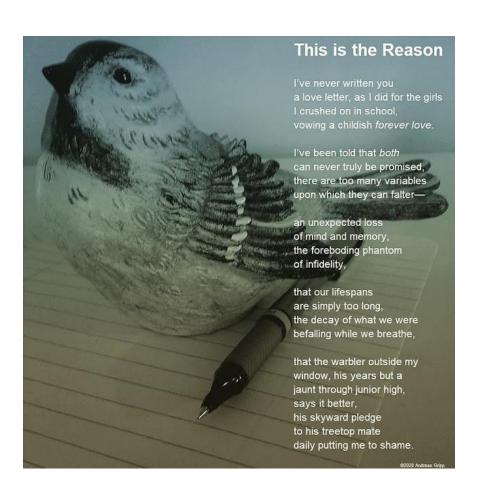
lowering it precisely into the record after the opening verse has been sung, singling out the chorus as if that alone were more than enough.

I was recently told
I was doing it wrong,
failing to leave a space
between this trinity
of dots. It takes up
too much room, I replied,
looks peculiar on the page.

Do not leave me wondering what these lines conceivably said, in the heat of an angry moment, within the quote of a love confessed,

this trail that leaves the ending to conjecture, a search for the discarded we were never supposed to know.

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Goderich

The stones amid the rocks form a pattern we promptly discern—*Inuksuk*, conveying human without a visage, from meticulous, Inuit hands:

a marker on a route, a site of veneration, a place to catch some fish when we are hungry.

This beach is crowded over every summer, and the stones are just as plentiful as the sand. Tomorrow, the Inuksuit may be many, the art of imitation, Caucasian appropriation,

or the one that's been here days?

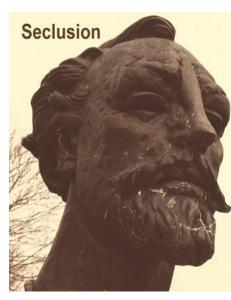
Dismantled, caught up in a wave
whenever the gales are temperamental,

or the consequence of a child, ambling along the shore, seeking *ujarak* flat and smooth, for skipping on the rippled sheen,

who took to playing Jenga under the sun, wary over dislodging from the middle, the kerplunking of a game that went awry, one *set* of naked footprints fleeing trespass, its shame and culpability,

to be expunged upon remorse, the sincerity of tears, this water's absolution once the wind has finished its rage.

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I have all the time in this pandemic world to create my Magnificat, the magnum opus to be said or sung for generations yet to come;

and with my calendar of vacant squares there is no excuse to delay, no obligation to grant me pardon.

They say Shakespeare had a similar quandary and he managed to pen King Lear—

no one to disturb or vex him while he dipped his feathered quill into the murk of bottled ink.

No pressure.

And whether the tragedy to unfold is due to the love or due to the greed I cannot say.

for I too will need Five Acts, a post-curtain bow, and I've still to build my stage of paper maché—

so do not let us flee our homes before this plague has ended.

Oh come, dear Cordelia, guide this blinded Gloucester to scribe whafever lines he must, give magnificence to a poem that will inspire—

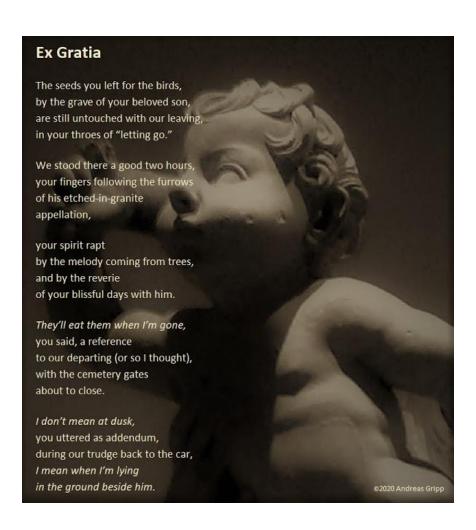
both the feverish woman in the laboratory forging on to our salvation,

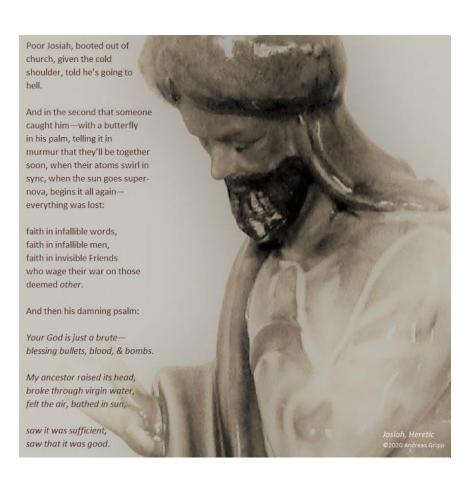
and to the man beneath the trees who sweats profusely, digging graves in case she fails.

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Having a Cigarette with Daphne du Maurier The ashtray in the drawing room the shadows of whom brims with stubs, and that take shape upon the walls. which mirrors soot. like a flame that licks the and I cannot say I blame you paint in feigned innocence, as your match ignites my vice, tickling before it consumes. setting it aglow like a hearth-side midnight ember, Like me, your narrator all but extinguished. isn't worthy of a Christian name, that we're unable to and you're telling me of live up to our Rebeccas. shrines and hidden places, all within this house-mansion, I call it, that Manderley, as an speaking as an apartment-dweller. incinerated shell. and I hope you understand, with its wild, snaking foliage that Mrs. de Winter creeping out of glassless windows. spent many a time stands victorious in its rubblein hotels, yearning for space to those of us who see before realizing that too much under a creaky roof what burns gives rise to conjured spectres, as not a hellish vision. encircling our throbbing skulls but a preface to paradise, like the smoky rings where all of us are called that surround us: within the fire, that there's a Mrs. Danvers by a voice which only lurking about every corner, we sinners understand.









The sunflower I photographed is missing a petal. With the dozens it still has, this is hardly a concern, for either myself or the sunflower.

It's the mystery of its disappearance that makes this a poem, why there's a gap like a lost tooth in what would otherwise simulate our star, a single ray alone illumining umbrae in which it may hide—

too long in its golden taper to become the victim of a ladybug's lunch,

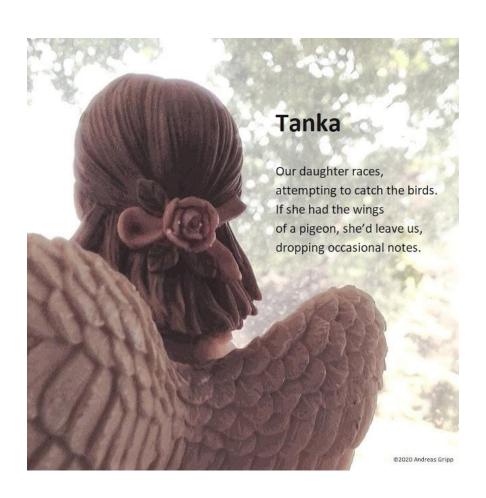
the wind as well having alibis in its day-long gentle breeze, no spore or plumage aloft amid the lengthening blades of grass;

barely lifting the tresses of the woman in her summer dress, its filac reflecting the light I noticed fivehundred seconds before,

during he loves me, he loves me not, in the absence of daisies gone, abandoning the disfiguring act right after the initial pull and pluck,

becoming sickened by the ugliness of chance, its reconstruction of her world—and our own

as something a little less beautiful.



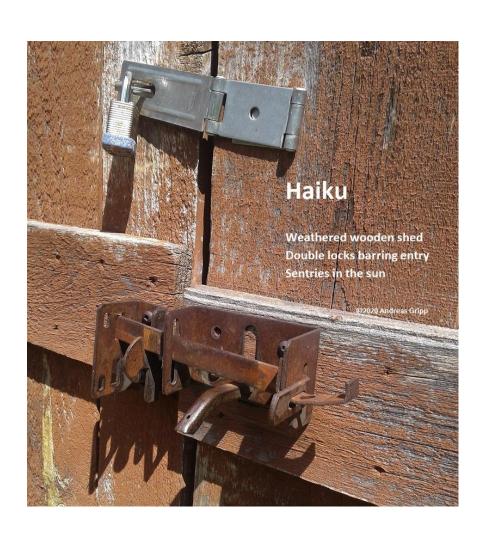


It's no one else's business, Martha, why you did what you did, or why you made the mistake of stepping out of bounds where geeks with glasses should never dare to tread.

Perhaps you got tired of sharing your lunch with the Chess Club, or wolfing down a sandwich amid a hurried rush to the library lest some thought you friendless if you stayed in the cafeteria to eat alone.

An "L" on the forehead may only come off with gasoline, but why torch the whole house and take your parents with you? Why not leave them to find you in a state of grace, yielding to the punishment that served them best?

Why not drop a pompom at your feet, letting them recall the day the ugliest girl in school tried out for cheerleading, so they may indeed know at least one reason why they saw you swinging from the end of a ragged noose, your diary turned to a blank page where your first kiss should have been?





The 8th Day

8 days a week, I love you
— Lennon & McCartney

The Julians and the Gregorians were both mistaken, their division of three-sixty-five done in err, for they'd neglected the day that should have been, each and every week the sum of eight, if only because it's an even number, would have made the *months* a little shorter, and because it makes good fodder for a poem.

The name of this day will have to stay unknown, except that it would have ended in day—

something like Nepday or Jupiday or after some other Roman god or celestial sphere and it would have been part of a weekend because 5 weekdays are more than enough for working

and that extra 24 hours, perhaps between Saturday and Sunday, would have made Christ's stay in the tomb as long as we'd figured it would be and that early Beatles' song a little less romantic than we'd previously imagined.

Austin Luther King Jr. Day:

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Opening Gala for Daniel Kotter, Artist-in-Residence

Your dirty sock flunked you out of school and that set you on your way (your classmates painted apples and got 10 A's and B's and C's).

We signed "we love you" in ASL but wouldn't call on teletype.
You sighed in corners while we danced, a token flower pressed on walls.

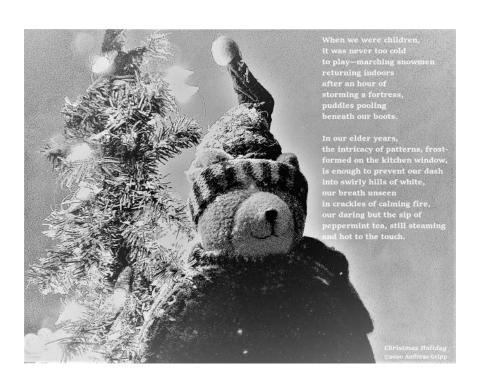
I saw you five years later, got your email on a card. Your portfolio is a pack of smokes – you cough your days away. Put a lampshade in your freezer, call it je ne sais quoi.
Sketch the neighbour raking snowflakes with a pool cue and a spade.

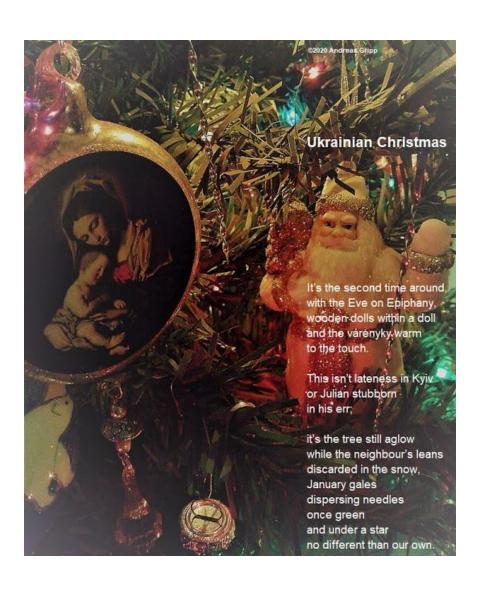
Snatch the *peaches* on the terrace and the mound of trash and tin. It's not too loud on small deaf ears or eyes that see pure gold.

The gallery was closed by 3 and no one stopped to gawk. You stood so still in nakedness:

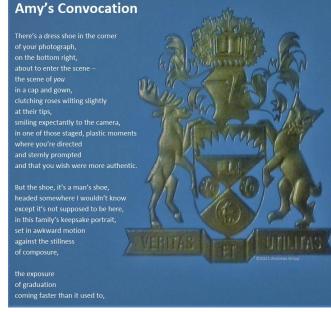
breath caught on windows, faced that flushed with shame; none to come and cover.

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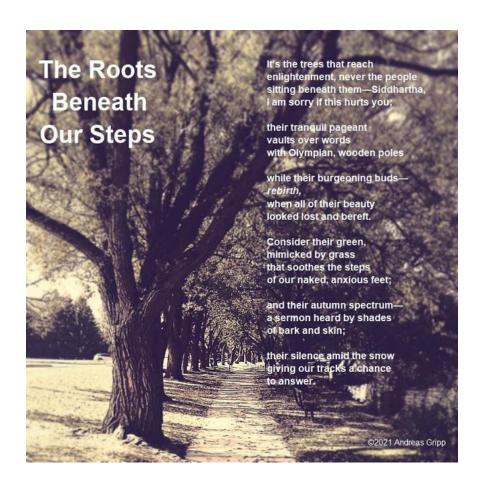
with our cell phone eyes and digital selves that flash worldwide in seconds.

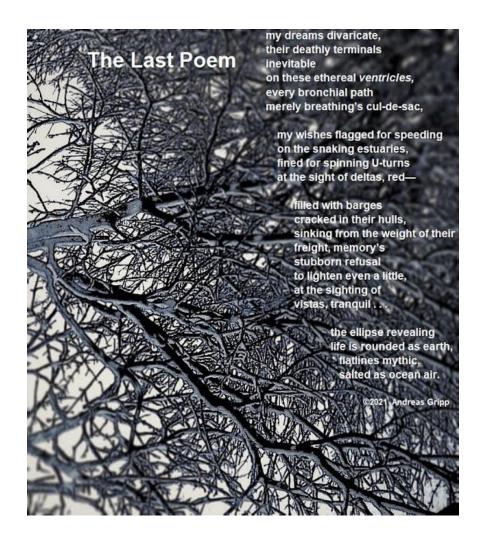
Your blonde, tumbling curls rest loosely on your shoulders, limp from humidity with the breeze too abated to life.

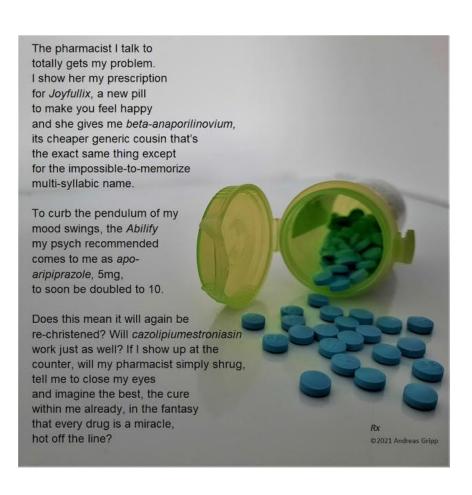
An expansive shrub guards you against the sun and scorching heat instinctively drawn to nylon black.

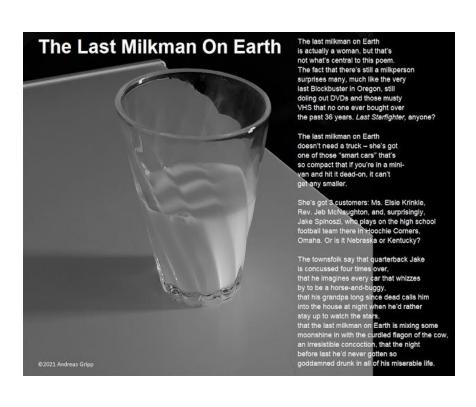
But about the shoe, it's chestnut brow and polished, with its lace drawn good and tight, preventing a bumbling trip that if timed to the moment of clicking could bring identity to this subtle intruder — his clothing, limbs and unwanted face

spontaneous, unrehearsed, forever *locked* in his clumsy fall.











It's the second weekend in March, and just before we went to bed I turned the clocks back an hour in that mass ritual called Daylight Savings Time. I'd said at dinner that time is a construct, there's no such thing as 1-2-3 o'clock, 4 o'clock rock, which was a great song Bill Haley and the Comets came up with in 1954. I also say there's no such thing as 1954, that the Earth is really 4 and a half billion years old, that even the Gregorian calendar is a few years off, that 2021 is really 2025 and that the first moon landing took place in July of '73. You tell me to fuck off, that I'm some kind of cosmic know-it-all when I say there's no July. this isn't Sunday, it's a day unique all its own, we just give the sun-ups and sun-downs names to make our schedules which capitalism demands. You then mention we've missed church, that in my knuckleheadedness I went the wrong way on the dial, that it's Fall back, Spring forward, that my retort of I thought it was Spring back and Fall ahead confirms my stupidity, that it's my never-ending clumsiness when I land on my face whenever I trip upon that infernal step just beyond our front door.



If it leaves a bad taste it isn't my fault, all that is mine is a sprinkle of salt

The ravioli's a mess, you give me that look; blame Boyardee don't say I can't cook

I forgot you're a vegan, our quarrel is petty, I'll make quick amends with a can of spaghetti

No bread from the oven, but slices of Wonder; forgive me, my sweet, for this leftover blunder

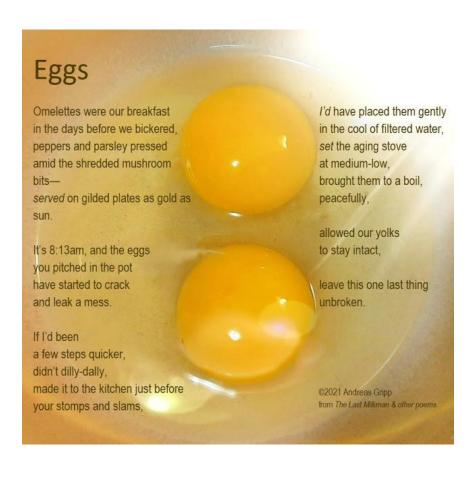
Next on the menu: salad-in-a-bag; I wish I'd have checked the "best before" tag

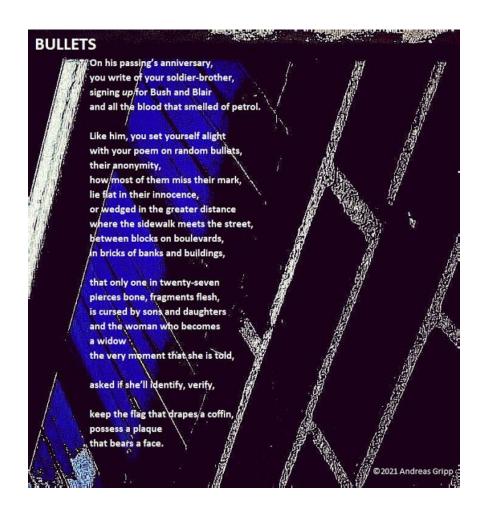
And for our dessert, some frozen gelato: a bargain-bin flavour— Venetian Tomahto

I'll pour you red wine, the Spumante's generic; your smile's a scowl, your state is hysteric

Arrivederci, you snarl, Come again, I reply, Mr. Noodles await, the next time it's Thai









Your Love

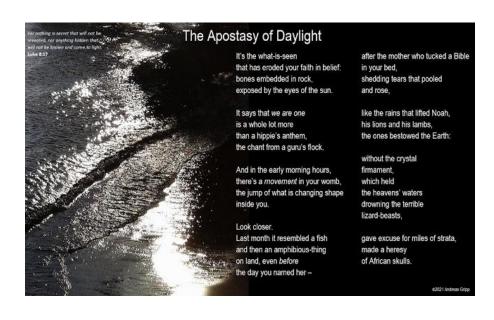
Your love came in a drought, bathing a cracked landscape until the first of flowers ascended as if out of nowhere.

There was nectar and there was water and there were bugs in flight to enhance its beloved state.

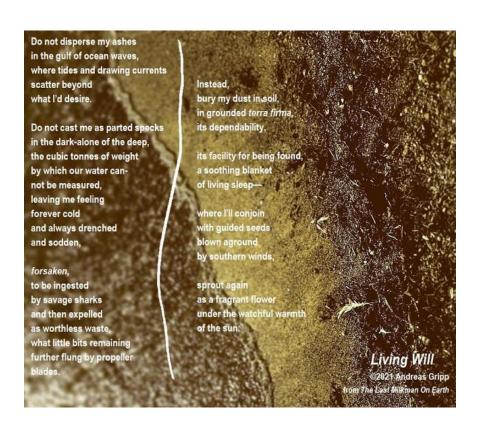
What had come before was merely the flash of storm followed by meteorologists pointing to radars—

clouds brimming black overhead, mocking with their drops of rain, blowing on past in search of less needy, thirsty ground.

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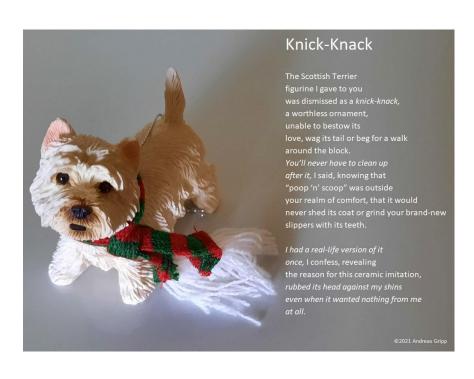


I've a compulsion to lie to love, spout it cannot last forever, being dishonest when I think of us in terms of merely friendship.

There's been no truth with passion it's a garden snake that weaves its way around an orchard's fruit, a politician's campaign smiles, and the kudos to your mother's hair when grey goes tangerine.

Even the mirror spews its lies – or maybe it's just the gaze from this beholder – the wrinkles that have furrowed and the dance of crows around these tired eyes, the ones you say are teary when I say you're beautiful, that make the world a blur, that distort our place within this grand deception.

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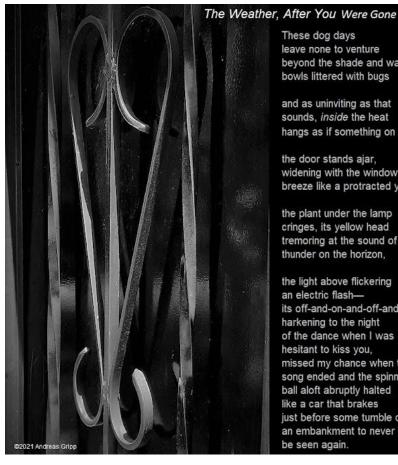
Road Signs

The day we drove past the *Green Valley Rest Home you* mentioned how lovely it sounded—to ease so gently into one's final years,

ignoring the failure to properly feed, medicate; the staff and familial neglect, the laying about atop one's own waste.

Minutes later, we saw it, the sign with a bovine's head, crudely painted on weathered wood—the abattoir, and the sentience therein that's butchered by the billions, how the death of such innocence can possibly sound so beautiful.

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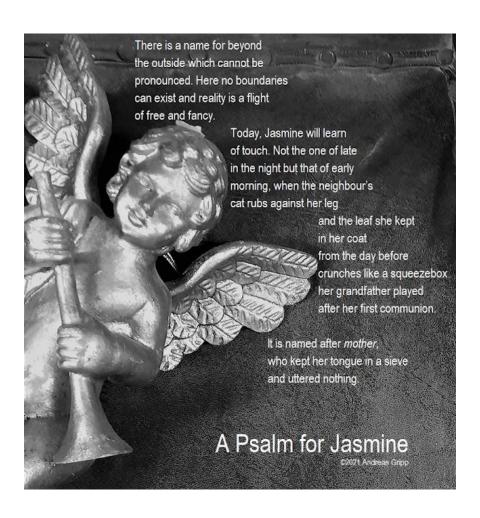
These dog days leave none to venture beyond the shade and water bowls littered with bugs

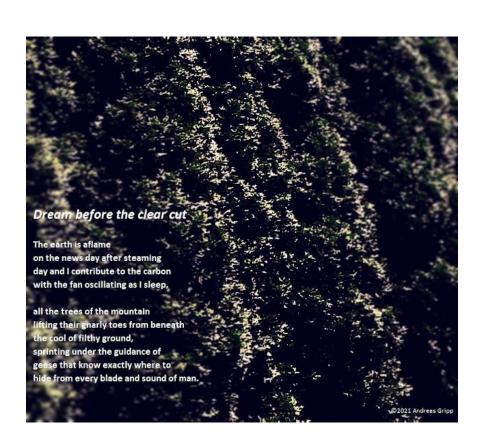
and as uninviting as that sounds, inside the heat hangs as if something on a nail;

the door stands ajar, widening with the window breeze like a protracted yawn,

the plant under the lamp cringes, its yellow head tremoring at the sound of thunder on the horizon,

the light above flickering an electric flashits off-and-on-and-off-and-on harkening to the night of the dance when I was hesitant to kiss you, missed my chance when the song ended and the spinning ball aloft abruptly halted like a car that brakes just before some tumble down an embankment to never be seen again.









Every autumn, you pine for what has past. The garden in all its glory. Her touch upon your face.

You adore the summer and the fireflies of night. What is light but space surrounded by the caress of darkness; flame but the intensity of a love so strong that it incinerates us all?

A Rose for William ©2021 Andreas Gripp





This Vision

Maybe I mirror her, in ways of insignificance, whenever I'm barely dressed, though she's more than just phantasmic, some fluid chimeric guest, absent of sex and of name, these faintest of curves unfurling, under lull of clement light, cerulean ceiling—this elusive, crooked sky



The author of 26 books and 20 chapbooks of poetry, as well as three books of fiction and three of photography, Andreas Gripp lives in Stratford, Ontario, with two cats and his wife, Carrie Lee.

